Dhammapāda Stories

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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.



Selected verses from the Dhammapāda and the stories behind them, all depicted in thirty-two beautiful illustrations.

DHAMMAPĀDA STORIES

(Gambhiro Bhikkhu)



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Compiled/Edited by Gambhiro Bhikkhu

Contents

Introduction

The Buddhist Canon, otherwise known as the Tipitaka, is the collection of the entire teachings of the Buddha. From out of this vast collection, inspirational verses which touch the essence of what the Buddha taught were compiled and recorded in a book called Dhammapāda. These verses, arranged under twenty-six chapters with such headings as *The Wise, Mindfulness,* and *Happiness* are part of the earliest extant records of words uttered by the Buddha himself.

There are 423 verses in the Dhammapāda, and behind each one of them is a story which bears a lesson of great moral value whether they concern such human flaws as pride and greed, or such virtues as compassion and generosity. It is primarily for this reason that for centuries throughout Southeast Asia, the Dhammapāda stories have been used by parents to instruct and entertain their children and have been recounted by monks to inspire and enlighten those who came to seek their guidance.

As to whether the stories are really based on historical fact or merely the products of vividly imaginative minds, discussion still goes on, but it is evident that the stories may not be entirely precise in detail nor free from exaggeration. One is nevertheless advised to keep an open mind in order to be able to appreciate the moral lessons the stories are trying to convey. In any case, even those who do doubt their authenticity would have to agree that the lessons they teach provide food for reflection which may consequently give a whole new direction to the way one thinks and lives. Moreover, because the Buddha always suited his teachings to the age, temperament, character, and mental state of his listeners, one may just be able to identify with any of the characters that are depicted in the Dhammapāda stories and benefit from that identification.

In addition, the Dhammapāda stories are a valuable source of

information regarding the personality of the Buddha himself: his temperament—the Buddha was always calm, patient and compassionate (no instance can be cited where the Buddha ever displayed any anger or spoke harshly); his great humility—he accepted food even from lowly servants and slaves, sometimes food that had already been partially eaten; his wisdom and skill in teaching—he was able to uproot the deep-seated unwholesome attitudes of even his most abusive and stubborn accusers and bring them to accept Right View.

For our collection, we have selected thirty-two Dhammapāda stories that we felt were particularly interesting and meaningful, and at the same time, representative of the different kinds of stories that the Dhammapāda contains, whether it be a humorous one as in the story of the fickle-minded monk who kept shuttling between the religious life and the home life so many times that his head was likened to a "whetting stone"; a poignant one as in the story of Gisa Kotami who, having lost her only son, went from house to house desperately seeking a remedy for his death; or a macabre one as in the story of Angulimala who kept tab of the number of victims he had murdered by wearing a necklace of their fingers around his neck.

We have afforded ourselves the liberty to dispense with parts of some of the original stories that we considered rather long or dull, and embellished others in an attempt to make them more palatable to the modern reader. This we have done, however, taking care to retain the original meaning of each story.

Those who would like to see the unedited versions of our stories can refer to *The Dhammapāda, Verses and Stories,* translated from Pali by Daw Mya Tin and published by the Myanmar Pitaka Association, Rangoon, 1986. This edition may not be readily available outside of Myanmar. A more accessible publication is *The Dhammapāda* by Ven. Sri Dhammananda which was published by the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, Malaysia, 1992, and which, with

few exceptions, reproduces the texts of the stories in the Myanmar edition almost verbatim. We have relied on these two publications as our main sources of reference in compiling our book.

In the introduction to his book, Ven. Sri Dhammananda makes the following remark about the Dhammapāda: “It is impossible to estimate how many human beings have refrained from telling a lie, killing an insect, spreading a rumor, or taking what is not given, by calling to mind a story from the Dhammapāda at the right moment. If the world has experienced moments of compassion and wisdom in the face of greed, hatred, and delusion, the Dhammapāda must be given its due share of credit for it.”

No doubt the Dhammapāda will continue to be a source of inspiration and edification to all who seek spiritual upliftment within its pages.

The Editor

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge our appreciation to the following bhikkhunis: Rev. Jen Du, Rev. Shing Ing, Rev. Jian Jih, and Rev. Shiou Ding, as well as to Ms Hsu Mei Jr and Mr. Hsu Te Wei for their assistance in the translation of the English texts into Chinese; to Ms Aye Sabai Win for proofreading the English manuscript and making constructive suggestions; and especially to Rev. Dau Soon for enriching our stories with her vivid illustrations. Her drawings were inspired by the beautiful art work of Mr. U. G. de Silva that appeared in the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardana Society’s edition of *The Dhammapāda, 1988.*

Hatred in the world is indeed never
appeased by hatred.
It is appeased by loving kindness.
This is an ancient law.

Verse 5



The Lady and the Ogress

The Lady and the Ogress

Once there was a man who was becoming impatient with his wife for not being able to bear him any children. At the same time, his wife was becoming increasingly anxious because she was not able to give him the children he longed for. Fearing that her husband would one day abandon her, she coaxed him into taking another wife. But each time she learned that the new wife was pregnant, she caused her to miscarry by putting some drugs into her food.

The second wife eventually figured out what was going on, but it was too late to do anything about it, for she was already near death's door from being poisoned so often. Before she finally died, however, she swore that she would pay the first wife back for all the suffering she was caused should their paths cross again in future lives.

And indeed their paths did cross again. Once they were reborn as a cat and a hen, and another time as a leopardess and a doe, and each time they were after each other's offsprings, creating more and more hatred between themselves. Finally, they were reborn as the daughter of a nobleman and an ogress.

One day, the ogress in all her fury was chasing after the nobleman's daughter and her baby. The mother, in desperation, fled to the monastery where the Buddha was staying and begged the Buddha to save her child from the hungry ogress.

The Buddha, instead, admonished her, as well as the ogress, for the folly of their unabated vengeance. He then related to them how their mutual hatred began and how, because of that hatred, they had been killing off each other's babies in their successive lifetimes. He made them realize that hatred only caused more hatred, and that hatred ceased only through goodwill and compassion. The lady and the ogress then felt great remorse for their past actions and asked each other for forgiveness. In that way, after many lifetimes of unbroken rivalry filled with hatred, they finally made peace with each other.

> ***Hatred in the world is indeed never appeased by hatred. It is appeased only by loving kindness. This is an ancient law.***
>
> ***Verse 5***



The Lady and the Ogress

Here he grieves, hereafter he grieves.
The evil-doer grieves in both existences.
He grieves and he suffers anguish
when he remembers his impure deeds.

Verse 15



The Cruel Butcher

The Cruel Butcher

There was once a butcher who was a very mean and wicked man. Never in his life had he ever done any meritorious deeds. His job was slaughtering pigs and he loved it, often torturing them mercilessly before putting them to death.

One day he got very sick and finally died, but before he died he suffered such agony that he crawled around on his hands and knees for days, squealing and grunting like a pig being slaughtered.

It so happened that the butcher's home was within ear's reach of the monastery where the Buddha and his monks were staying. When the bhikkhus heard the desperate squeals coming from his house, they assumed that the miserable butcher was at his cruel work again and shook their heads in great disapproval. The squeals and grunts went on for several days until, one day, they stopped just as suddenly as they had begun. The monks could not help but remark to each other how wicked and hard-hearted the butcher was for having caused his poor animals so much pain and suffering.

The Buddha overheard what they were saying and said, "Bhikkhus, the butcher was not slaughtering his pigs. He was very ill and in such great pain that he was acting like the pigs he used to enjoy inflicting pain upon. His bad kamma had finally caught up with him. Today he died and was reborn in a woeful state of existence."

The Buddha then exhorted his disciples to be alert at doing good, for anyone who did evil deeds would have to suffer for them. There was no way to escape from one's evil deeds, he warned his disciples.

> ***Here he grieves, hereafter he grieves. The evil-doer grieves in both existences. He grieves and he suffers anguish when he remembers his impure deeds.***

Verse 15



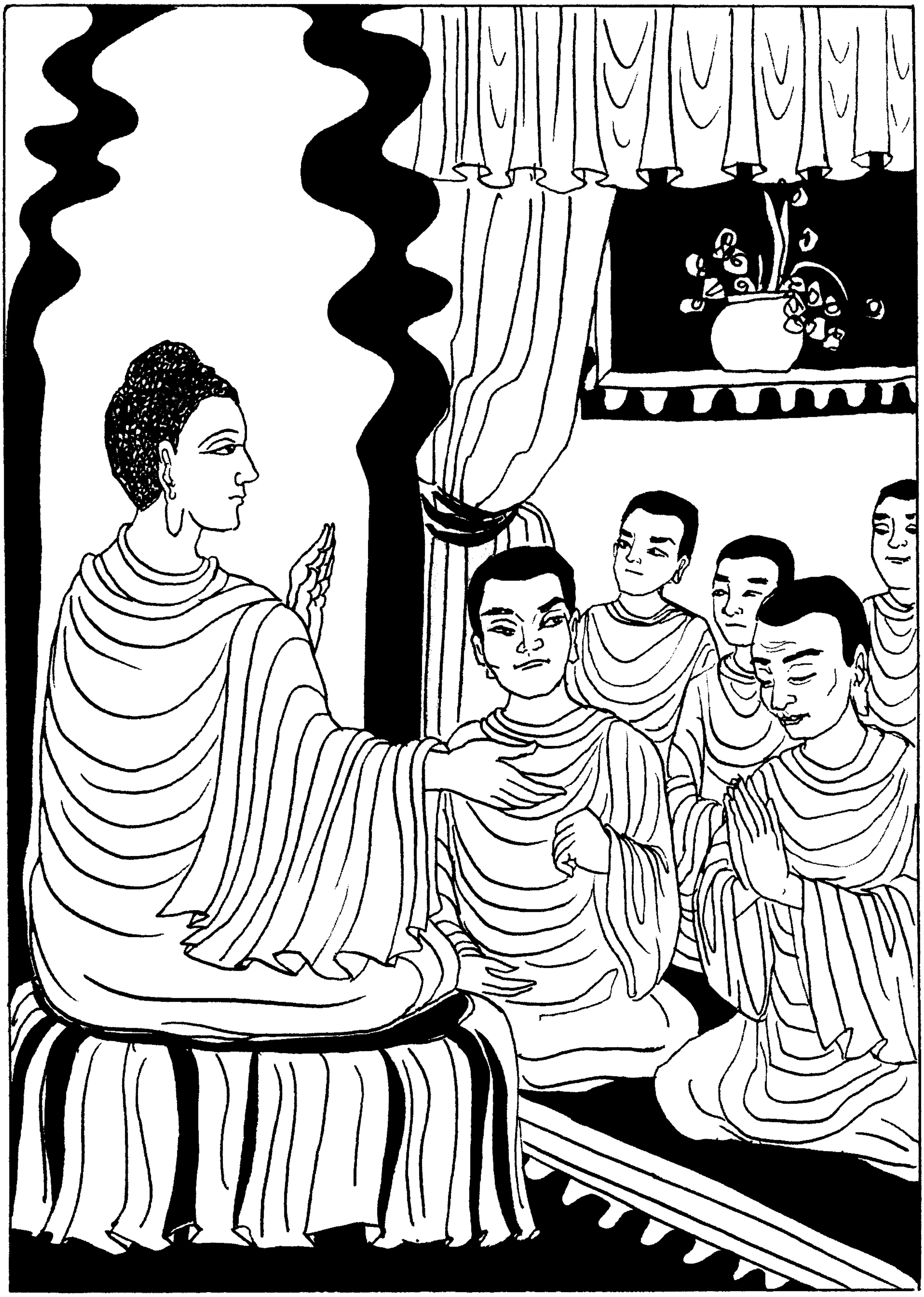
The Cruel Butcher

Though a person recites much of the sacred texts, but is negligent and does not practise according to the Dhamma, he cannot share the blessings of the holy life, just as a cowherd, counting other people's cows, cannot taste the milk that comes from them.

Verse 19

Though a person recites only a little of the sacred texts, but practises according to the Dhamma and becomes truly wise, thus forsaking lust, hatred, and delusion, and no longer clinging to anything of this or any other world, he indeed shares the benefits of the holy life.

Verse 20



The Scholar Monk and the Arahat

The Scholar Monk and the Arahat

ONCE THERE WERE TWO MEN who entered the monkhood at the same time but who followed different aspirations. One studied the sacred doctrines until he attained such a proficiency in them that quite a number of admiring students gathered around him to hear him teach. The other practised very hard and eventually became an arahat with great spiritual insights.

One day, the two bhikkhus happened to meet each other for they had gone to see the Buddha at the same time. The proud master of the sacred texts, however, had no idea that the monk he just met was already one of high spiritual attainments. Treating him with disdain, as he did most monks, the scholar wanted to embarrass the arahat in front of everyone by asking him questions from the texts which he was sure the arahat would not be able to answer. What the scholar did not know, however, was that whoever brought harm in any form upon an arahat would end up being reborn in a lower world.

To prevent that from happening, the Buddha decided to choose and ask the questions himself. He put questions concerning the higher states of meditation to the scholar monk who, of course, could not answer them because he had not practised what he had recited and preached. On the other hand, the second bhikkhu had no problem with the questions, answering them humbly but yet with evident authority. When the questioning session was over, the Buddha praised the arahat generously, but made no mention of the learned scholar.

The other bhikkhus wondered why the Buddha praised the arahat and not the illustrous teacher. The Buddha explained to them that although the first bhikkhu was well versed in and

knowledgeable of the sacred scriptures, he did not live in accordance with the Dhamma. The Buddha compared him to a cowherd who tended somebody else's cows only to earn money and so did not get to drink any of the cows' milk, while the one who practised the Dhamma was like the owner who enjoyed not only his cows' milk but all the dairy products that could be made from it as well.

Similarly, the scholar monk only enjoyed whatever services his pupils afforded him but not the benefits of sainthood. On the other hand, though the arahat could barely recite anything from the sacred scriptures, through his diligent practise he had come to understand the essence of the Dhamma and so no longer harbored any greed, hatred, or delusion in his mind. He thus truly reaped the benefits of sainthood.

Though a person recites much of the sacred texts, but is negligent and does not practise according to the Dhamma, he cannot share the blessings of the holy life, just as a cowherd, counting other people's cows, cannot taste the milk that comes from them.

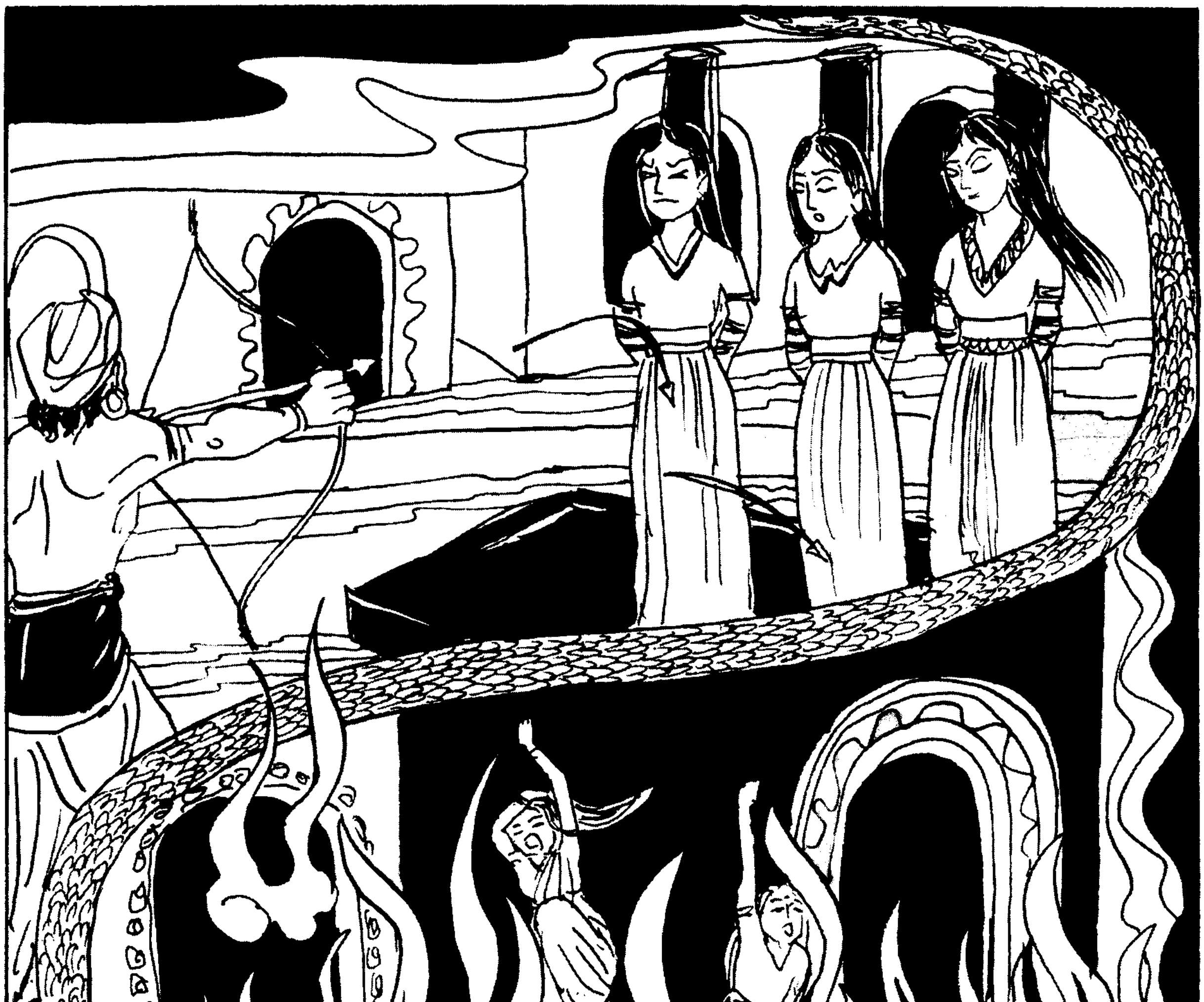
Verse 19

Though a person recites only a little of the sacred texts, but practises according to the Dhamma and becomes truly wise, thus forsaking lust, hatred, and delusion, and no longer clinging to anything of this or any other world, he indeed shares the benefits of the holy life.

Verse 20

Mindfulness is the way to the Deathless (Nibbana), unmindfulness the way to Death. Those who are mindful do not die, and those who are not are as if already dead.

Verse 21



Mindfulness Means Life

Mindfulness Means Life

Queen Samavati and her ladies-in-waiting all wanted to go and pay homage to the Buddha but feared that the king would not approve. So they made holes in the walls of their living quarters from which they could see the Buddha as he passed by the palace and bow their heads in reverence to him.

Another consort in the king's harem, however, was of a different mind. She despised the Buddha. She had never forgotten how her father had once offered her hand in marriage to him and how he had flatly refused. She had felt so humiliated that she vowed to make him pay dearly for it one day.

Her chance had finally come, she thought, upon discovering what the queen and her maids were up to. She went and lied to the king saying that the Buddha was secretly seeing Queen Samavati behind his back. She then took the king to see the holes in the walls for himself. But when the king asked his queen to account for them, he remained satisfied with her reply and let the matter drop.

The consort then decided that if she would not be able to take out her revenge on the Buddha himself, she would take it out on his admirers. This she did by trying to make the king believe that Queen Samavati and her maids were plotting to kill him. She first warned the king to beware of the ladies' treachery, and then went and hid a snake in his lute. When the king picked it up to play, the snake came out hissing at him, ready to strike. It took little else to convince the king that his consort was indeed telling him the truth.

He went to Queen Samavati's chambers and commanded her and her maids to stand up all in a row. He then shot poisoned arrows at them. No matter how hard he tried, however, he missed them all, for the arrows seemed to veer away from their intended targets all by themselves. This proved to the king that the ladies

were all pure and innocent, and to show remorse for his mistake, he allowed the ladies to invite the Buddha and his monks to the palace for a meal.

The wicked consort, in the meantime, was beside herself with frustration and rage, but she was not about ready to give up. Next, she devised what she considered to be a foolproof plan. She asked an uncle to set fire to Samavati's quarters while the women were all inside. As the building went up in flames, however, the queen and her attendants did not flinch. They continued to mindfully meditate and succeeded in reaching the higher levels of spiritual attainment before they finally died.

The king at once suspected that his consort was the one behind the disaster and wanted to prove it. He said in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear, "Whoever has done this is my savior and should be richly rewarded. Up to now I have lived in the fear of being murdered by my own wife, but now I am free and can sleep in peace."

The foolish consort immediately revealed her and her uncle's part in the horrendous crime, anxious for the king's favors. The king feigned delight at her confession and asked her to invite her entire family to the palace where they would be honored. Once assembled, however, they were all put to death.

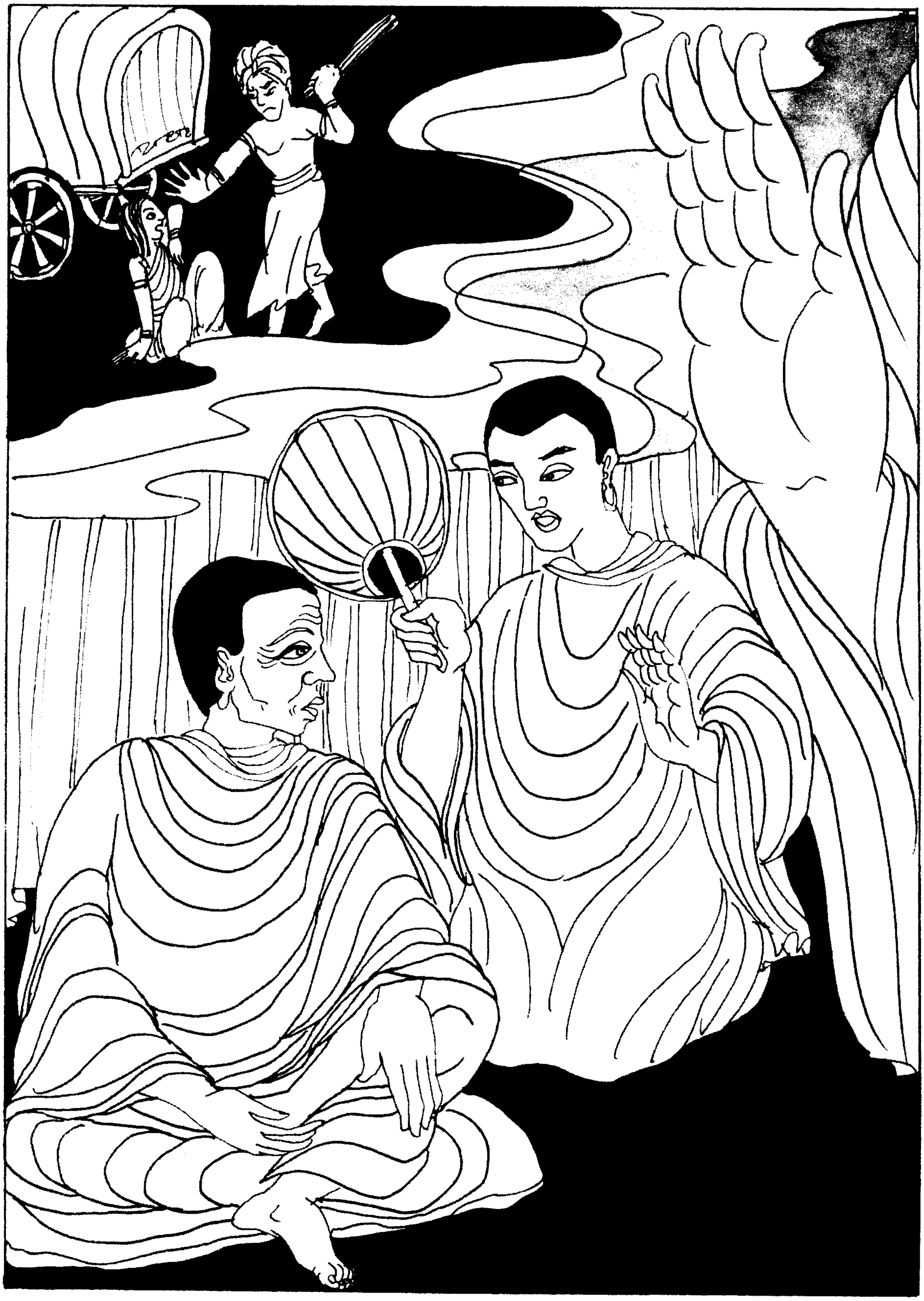
When it was reported to the Buddha how the queen and her attendants had died, he told them that those who were mindful did not die. It was those not mindful who, even though still alive, were as good as dead.

Mindfulness is the way to the Deathless (Nibbana), unmindfulness the way to Death. Those who are mindful do not die, and those who are not are as if already dead.

Verse 21

One who subdues the wandering mind,
which strays far and wide, alone, bodiless,
will be freed from the bonds of temptation.

Verse 37



The Wandering Mind

The Wandering Mind

Once there was a young monk named Sangharakkhita. While he was staying in a village monastery, he was offered two robes and decided to offer one of them to his uncle who was also a monk and whom he held in high esteem.

When he tried to present the robe to his uncle, however, his uncle refused to accept it, saying that he already had the robes required. The young monk interpreted his uncle's refusal as a personal affront. He felt so offended that he decided on the spot he would rather disrobe than be a part of an order where there were such arrogant monks as his uncle.

Sangharakhitta wanted to leave the monastery right away but his uncle asked him to stay and fan him a while since it was a very hot day. Sangharakhitta did as his uncle asked, but did so more out of a sense of duty than out of deference, for he was still brooding over his uncle's refusal to accept his gift. And as he fanned his uncle, his mind started to wander. "What will I do," he thought, "as soon as I become a layman again?"

Well, first he was going to sell the robe and buy a she-goat. The she-goat would then give him many more goats and he would sell them and finally save enough money to get married. Soon his wife would give birth to a son and they would go to the monastery to show him off to their uncle. On the

way, however, an argument would ensue between them, for he would want to carry the child as he drove the cart, but his wife would insist otherwise. As he would make a grab for the child, it would fall off the cart and get run over by one of its wheels. He would then be so upset that he would start beating up his poor wife.

At that point of his daydreaming, he accidentally struck his uncle's head with the fan. The old monk who was able to read Sangharakkita's thoughts admonished him, saying, "It's not enough to beat on your wife? You've got to beat on an old monk as well?"

Sangharakkhita was so surprised and ashamed when he realized that his uncle had been reading his mind that he wanted to run away. Instead, the good uncle took him to see the Buddha.

When told what happened, the Buddha spoke gently to the young monk and said, "The mind can wander off and think of things that have not yet taken place. It is best to concentrate on the present instead and strive diligently to free oneself from greed, hatred, and delusion."

One who subdues the wandering mind, which strays far and wide, alone, bodiless, will be freed from the bonds of temptation.

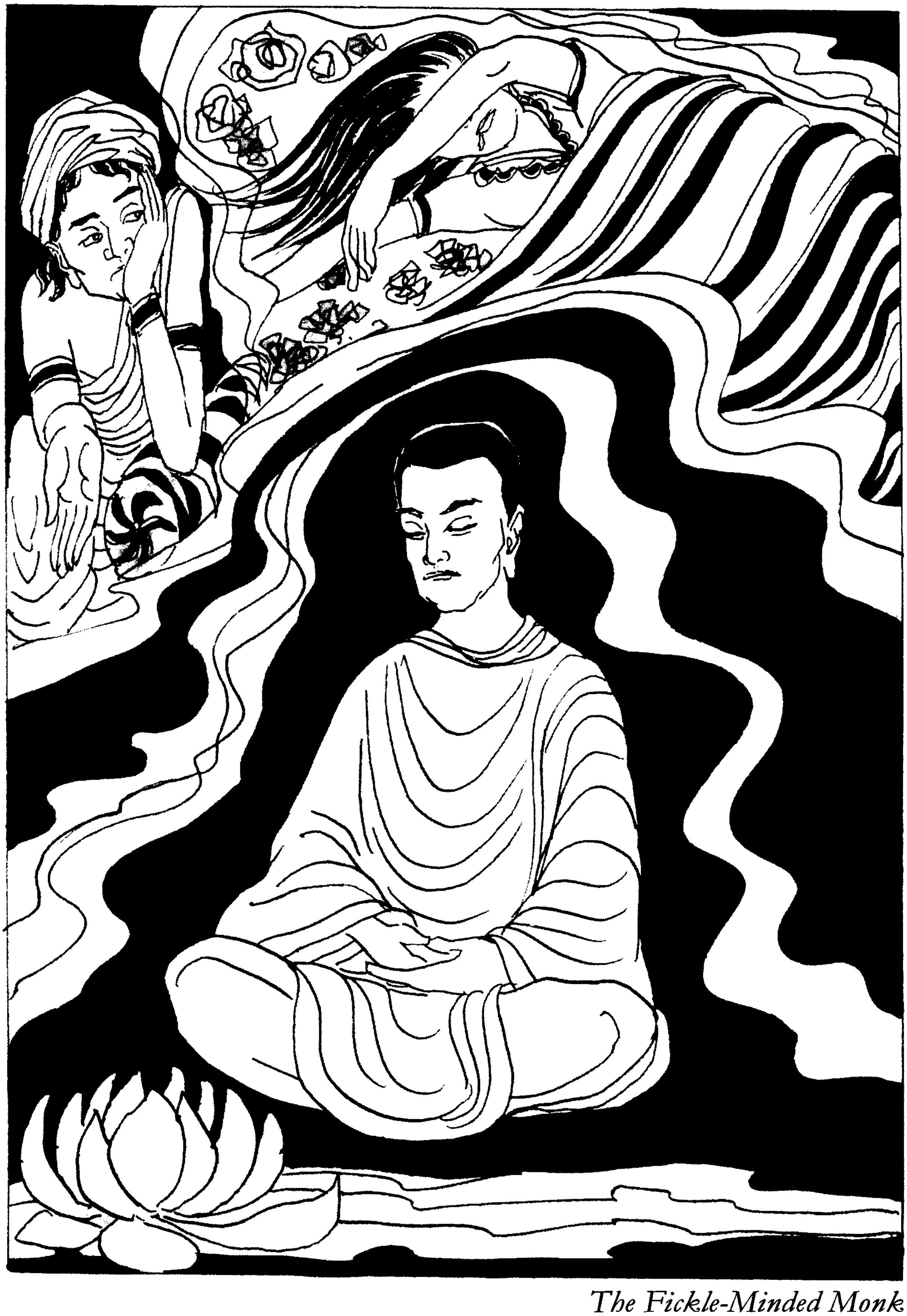
Verse 37

A fickle-minded man will never attain perfect wisdom, since he is ignorant of the Dhamma and his faith is not steadfast.

Verse 38

The mind of the vigilant man is fearless,
It is free of lust and anger.
It has abandoned both good and evil.

Verse 39



The Fickle-Minded Monk

The Fickle-Minded Monk

CITTA HATTA HAD BEEN LOOKING for one of his oxen gone astray in the woods for quite some time when he started to feel very hungry. He came upon a monastery and there he was given something to eat. While he was having his meal, he could not help but remark how the monks' fare was better than what he himself could normally afford even after a hard day's work. So, on a whim, he decided to leave his wife and home and become a monk.

Although he started off well by following the rules of the monastery, he slowly became bored with his new lifestyle and ended up not even wanting to go out on his daily almsround. Soon he was feeling restless and longed so much for his wife's company again that he finally left the Order and returned home. But after a while, feeling that life at home was too hard, he returned to the monastery and became a bhikkhu again. Then feeling lonely once more, he disrobed and went home to be with his wife again. He shuttled back and forth like this between home and monastery six times.

The sixth time he returned to the householder's life, his wife became pregnant and he was delighted. Then one night as she lay sleeping soundly, he went into their bedroom to admire her new condition and found her snoring loudly, saliva running down the side of her chin, and her clothes and hair in disarray. Seeing his wife lying like that with her mouth open and her stomach bloated, Citta Hattha could not help but think that she looked just like a corpse.

Suddenly he felt a disgust arise within himself that surprised him, but it was then that he realized the unpleasant and impermanent nature of the body. He stood there thinking, "I have already entered the Order six times and each time I have disrobed because of my lust for sensual pleasure. Now I have understood the true

nature of the body and will not be fooled again." He decided to leave home and become a bhikkhu once and for all. On the way to the monastery he kept reflecting on impermanence and unsatisfactoriness and as a result attained the first stage of sainthood.

Back at the monastery, the bhikkhus were not at all eager to see Citta Hatta again, for the notoriety of his fickle-mindedness had become too well known among them. So when Citta Hatta requested to be admitted into the Order once more, they all refused to let him do so. "You have been shaving your head so often it is like a whetting stone," they chided. But Citta Hatta remained adamant and the bhikkhus finally relented.

Several months passed, and although Citta Hatta had still not disrobed, his fellow bhikkhus remained doubtful of his determination to lead the holy life. They started to tease him by asking him when he was going back to see his wife again. He would answer them by saying, "Previously, indeed, I used to return to the lay life because I still had attachments, but now I have none." The bhikkhus told the Buddha what Citta Hatta said and the Buddha replied, "His mind was not steadfast before and he did not understand the Dhamma but, now, he is already an arahat and has truly discarded all attachments. This time Citta Hatta will not be going home again."

A fickle-minded man will never attain perfect wisdom, since he is ignorant of the Dhamma and his faith is not steadfast.

Verse 38

The mind of the vigilant man is fearless. It is free of lust and anger. It has abandoned both good and evil.

Verse 39

Before long, alas, this body will lie lifeless on the ground, discarded like a useless log.

Verse 41



The Monk Whose Body Stunk

The Monk Whose Body Stunk

Once when the Buddha was wandering about teaching and preaching, he came upon a community of his monks in which one of them was suffering from a debilitating skin disease. Sores that continually oozed blood and pus covered his body from head to foot. Too weak to wash himself or his stained robes, a nauseating stench had settled about him which none of his brother monks could bear. And so he was left alone, unable to fend for himself. It was in this pitiful state that the Buddha found him and immediately proceeded to look after him.

First, the Buddha went to boil some water and brought it back to bathe the monk. Then, as he was trying to carry the monk outside to bathe him, the other monks saw him and came to help. They all took hold of the couch that the sick monk was lying on and carried him to a place where he was gently scrubbed clean. In the meantime, his clothes were taken away and washed. When they were dry, they dressed the sick monk in fresh clean robes, which made him also feel clean and fresh.

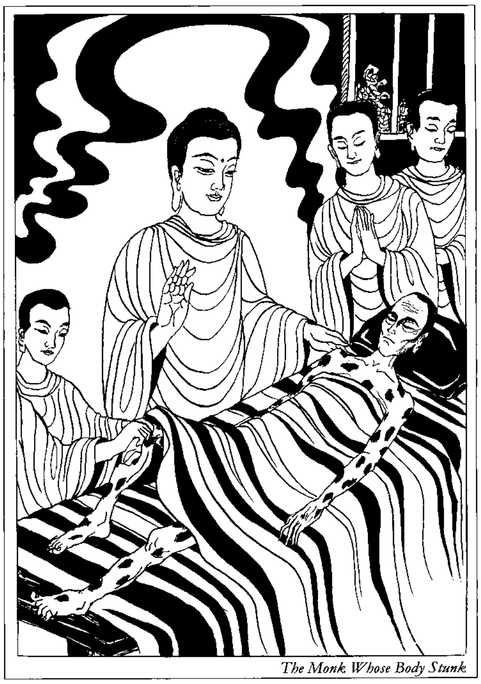
The Buddha then admonished the bhikkhus present, saying, "Bhikkhus, here you have no mother or father to take care of you when you are sick. Who will take care of you then if you don't take care of one another? Remember whenever you look after a sick person, it is as if you were looking after me myself."

He then followed with a small sermon in which he said that although it was true that the body would one day be as useless as a fallen log, while it was still alive, it should be taken care of.

In the state of heightened alertness in which the sick monk dwelled, brought on in part by the fresh bath and fresh clothes, he attained enlightenment at the end of the sermon.

Before long, alas, this body will lie lifeless on the ground, discarded like a useless log.

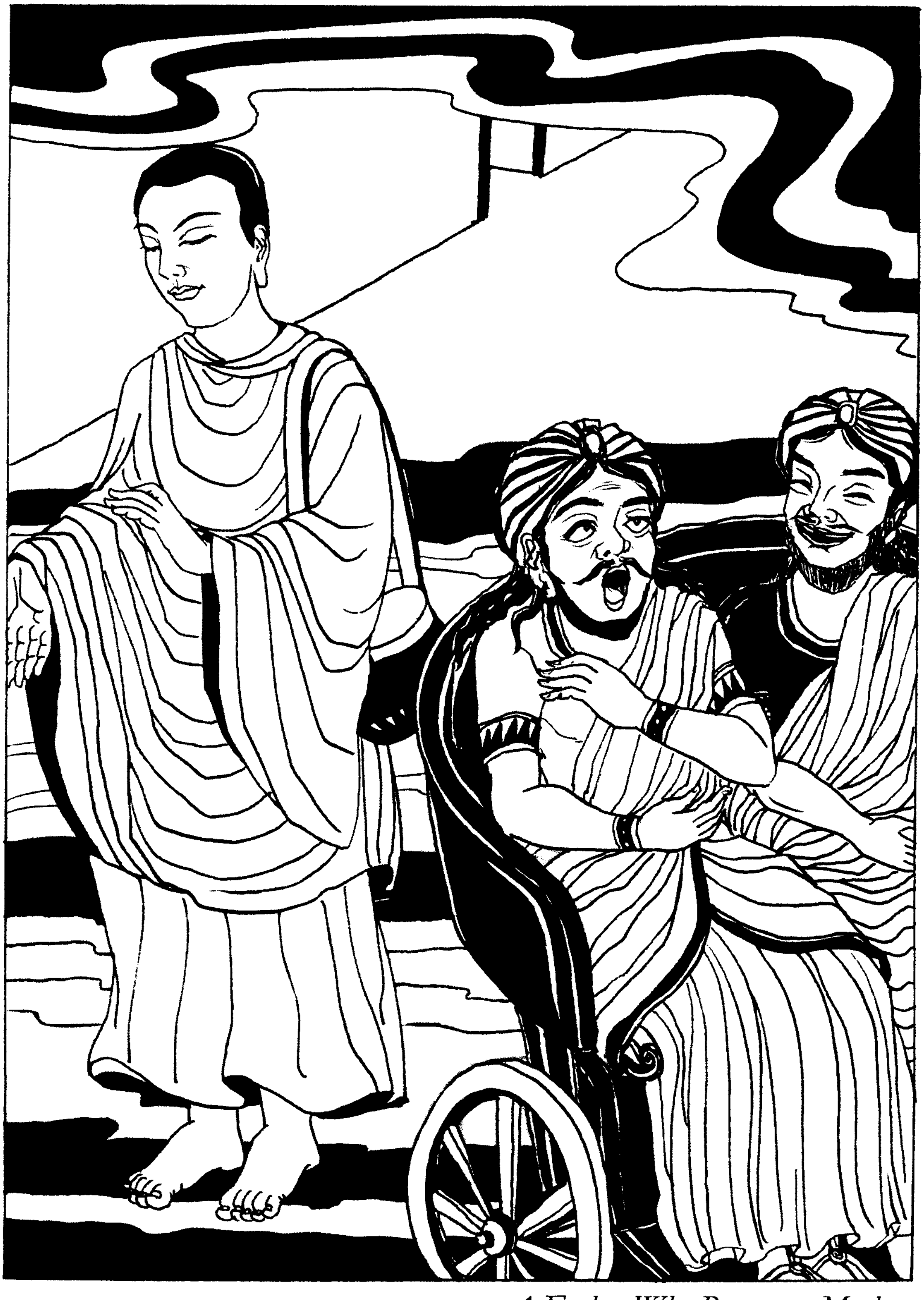
Verse 41



The Monk Whose Body Stunk

Not a mother, nor a father,
nor any other relative can do one greater
good than one's own well-directed mind.

Verse 43



A Father Who Became a Mother

A Father who became a Mother

Soreyya, a man of name and reputation, was already the father of two sons. One morning, as he and a friend were on their way to bathe in a nearby river, they happened to pass a monk whose glowing complexion kindled desire in Sorreya's heart. "Oh, how I wish my wife had that same beautiful golden skin!" he thought.

Hardly had he completed his wish when he experienced a strange physical sensation. To his horror, he realized that he had changed into a woman. Too ashamed to return home and face his family and friends, he, now a she, decided to go and live in a city far away.

In her newly adopted home, Soreyya was introduced to a rich merchant who had an eye for beautiful things. He asked Soreyya to marry him and she accepted. Not long after, she gave birth to a son, and not long after that, another one.

One day, a friend from her hometown happened to come to her house on business. Although he did not recognize her, she immediately recognized him and started asking about her family. He did not know who she was but was intrigued that she would be so concerned about people she had never met. Finally Soreyya revealed to him who she really was and recounted what had happened to her on the day she had wrongful thoughts about the handsome monk. The friend then advised her to have one of her servants go and look for the monk and invite him to their home for a meal. In that way, he said, she could explain to him what had happened and ask for his forgiveness.

It was not easy locating the monk, but he was finally found and taken to Soreyya's house where he was fed well. After the meal, Soreyya ashamedly related that she had once been a man, but because as a man she had had wrongful thoughts of him, she had

turned into a woman. She was now full of regret for her past action. The monk listened carefully and forgave her. As a result, Soreyya changed back into a man again.

Of course, the man who used to be Soreyya's husband was left stunned by the transformation of his wife, but being of a gentle and compassionate nature, he invited Soreyya to continue to live with them since, as a woman, he was really the mother of their sons and, he, the father. So even if Soreyya was no longer a woman, the sons were really had all perished when the roof of their house collapsed on them during a violent storm.

Driven to madness by her tragic misfortunes, Patacara wandered around aimlessly, until one day she found her way to a monastery where the Buddha was staying. There she tearfully recounted to him how she had lost her sons, husband, parents and brothers all at one time. The Buddha consoled her by saying that she should not worry about those already dead, but should strive instead to purify her mind and strive for full enlightenment, for those who did not succeed in perceiving the conditions of all component things in their lifetime would be wasting that lifetime, even if they reached to be a hundred years old.

After hearing the Buddha speak, Patacara realized the uncertainty and futility of existence and became established in the path that led to enlightenment. She then entered the Order and finally became an arahat.

A single day in the life of one who has perceived the impermanence of all conditioned things is worth more than a hundred years in the life of one who has not done so.

Verse 113

Better it is to live one day comprehending the Deathless than a hundred years without ever comprehending the Deathless.

Verse 114



The Cure for Death

The Cure for Death

Soon after Gisa Kotami got married, she gave birth to a son whom she loved dearly. Then, one day, when he was just beginning to learn how to walk, he suddenly fell ill and died. This left Gisa Kotami deeply grieved. Unable to accept her only son's death, she roamed the streets with him held tightly in her arms, asking whomever she came across for some medicine that could cure her son and bring him back to life. Luckily she came upon a kindly man who realized her plight and advised her to go and see the Buddha. "The Buddha alone," he told her, "has the antidote to death."

When the Buddha saw Gisa Kotami, he realized that she was too grief-stricken to listen to reason and so resorted to some skillful means to help her. He told her that he could indeed restore her son back to life if she could get him a mustard seed. "However," the Buddha warned, "the mustard seed must not come from any household where death has ever occurred. If you can bring one back to me, your child will live again."

Gisa Kotami felt great relief and was overjoyed at the prospect of having her son once more playing at her side. Full of hope, she hurriedly went from house to house, but nowhere could she find a household in which no one had ever died. At last it dawned on her that she was not alone in her grief, for everyone else had suffered the loss of a loved one at one time or another. When she realized that, she lost

all attachment to the dead body of her son and understood what the Buddha was trying to teach her: nothing born can ever escape death.

Gisa Kotami then buried her son and went to tell the Buddha that she could find no family where tears had never been shed over a lost loved one. The Buddha said to her, "You have now seen that it is not only you who have ever lost a son, Gisa Kotami. Death comes to all beings, for fleeting and impermanent is the nature of all component things."

Gisa Kotami then became a nun and strove hard to eventually perceive the state of no death and no sorrow, which is the deathless state of Nibbana.

> ***Better it is to live one day comprehending the Deathless than a hundred years without ever comprehending the Deathless.***
>
> ***Verse 114***

Do not think lightly of doing good, saying,
"A little will not affect me." Just as a water jar is
filled up by falling rain, drop by drop,
the wise one is filled up with merit
by accumulating it little by little.

Verse 122



Bilalapadaka, The Selfish Rich Man

Bilalapadaka, The Selfish Rich Man

One of the men in Bilalapadaka's neighborhood liked to do charitable deeds. One day, he arranged to have the Buddha and his disciples over to his house for a meal. Being a generous person, he wished to give everyone a chance to share the joy and merit of giving and so invited all of his neighbors to join in, even the rich but selfish Bilalapadaka.

The day before the merit-making event was to take place, the promoter of charity bustled from house to house, happily collecting whatever food his neighbors wished to contribute toward the meal.

Bilalapadaka, upon seeing his neighbor going around for donations, softly cursed under his breath, "What a miserable fellow! Why did he invite so many bhikkhus if he could not afford to provide for them properly by himself? Now he has to go around begging!"

When his neighbor came to his door, Bilalapadaka donated only a little salt, honey, and butter, which although gladly accepted, were kept separately from what the others had already given. The rich man was confused and wondered why his contribution was purposely kept aside. He thought maybe his neighbor intended to humiliate him by showing everyone how little a man of so much had offered. So he sent one of his servants to investigate.

Back at his house, the man took the things that Bilalapadaka had donated and divided them among the

pots of rice, curries, and sweetmeats in order to enhance their flavor. When the servant reported this to Bilalapadaka, Bilalapadaka still doubted his neighbor's true intention. So the next day he went to his house with a dagger hidden under his cloak and planned to kill his neighbor should he utter even a single word that would put him to shame.

But the man practising charity said to the Buddha, "Venerable Sir, the almsfood is not offered to you by me alone but with the help of many others in the neighborhood. Small or large, each contribution was given in faith and generosity, so may we all gain equal merit."

Bilalapadaka became ashamed when he heard what his generous neighbor said to the Buddha, for he realized then what a great mistake he had committed. He went and asked his neighbor to forgive him.

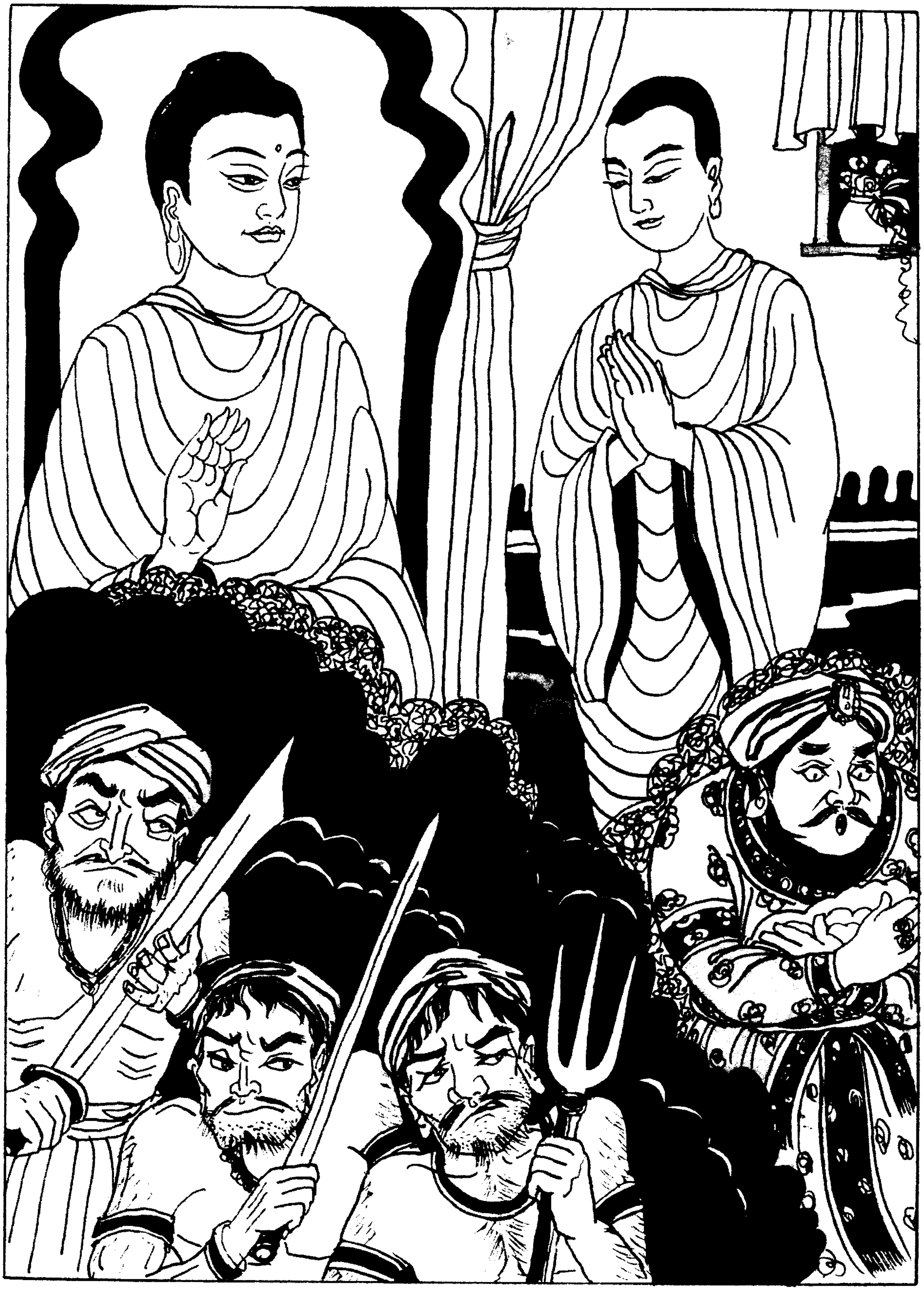
When the Buddha heard Bilalapadaka's words of remorse and learned the reason for them, he said to the people assembled there, "No matter how small a good deed you may get to do, don't think that it is not important, for if you habitually do small deeds, in the long run they will become big ones."

Do not think lightly of doing good, saying "A little will not affect me." just as a water jar is filled up by falling rain, drop by drop, the wise one is filled up with merit by accumulating it little by little.

Verse 122

Just as a wealthy merchant with few attendants
avoids a dangerous road, or just as one
who desires to go on living avoids poison,
even so should one shun evil.

Verse 123



The Wise Merchant

The Wise Merchant

Once there was a prosperous merchant who did not mind travelling long distances in order to deliver his merchandise to faithful buyers. Robbers got a wind of this and soon were trying to capture his carts loaded with fine and expensive goods. The merchant, however, was a clever man and each time succeeded in thwarting their plans.

On one of his journeys, the merchant learned that some monks were going to be travelling in the same direction, so he invited them to accompany him and promised to look after their every need along the way. No one was aware at the time, however, that some robbers had already heard of the merchant's trip and planned to ambush his caravan as it passed through a certain forest.

The wise merchant, in the meantime, made wary by past experiences, suspected something was amiss as they approached the forest. So instead of entering it, he decided to set up camp just outside its edge and stay there for a few days. Later, when he learned what the robbers were up to, he decided that for the safety of his travelling companions and his goods, it would be best to abort the trip and return home.

When news of this reached the ears of the robbers, they went and lay in wait for the merchant on the road back to the city. But the wise merchant also had his own scouts who

came back and warned him of the robbers' strategy. The merchant then decided to stay in a village where he had good friends and not budge for a few more days.

Upon hearing about the merchant's new plan, the monks decided to cut short their trip and return to their monastery. When they arrived there, they told the Buddha how their trip was complicated by robbers who aimed at looting the merchant's caravan and how the wise merchant outsmarted them each time.

The Buddha replied by telling them that the merchant was a wise man, for he evaded a journey beset with robbers like someone who did not want to die evaded poison. In the same way, the Buddha taught, a wise person who realizes that existence is like a journey beset with dangers, does his best to keep away from doing evil.

> ***Just as a wealthy merchant with few attendants avoids a dangerous road, or just as one who desires to go on living avoids poison, even so should one shun evil.***

Verse 123

Some are reborn as human beings,
the wicked are reborn in hell,
the righteous are reborn in heaven,
and those free from defilements pass away
into Nibbana.

Verse 126



The Innocent Monk

The Innocent Monk

ONCE THERE WAS A GEM POLISHER whose family offered almsfood to a certain monk every day. One morning as the monk was entering their house to accept his almsfood, a messenger from the king's palace arrived with a giant ruby for the gem polisher to work on. As the gem polisher had been in the kitchen handling some raw meat when the messenger arrived, the stone was wet with blood when he put it on a table before going into the kitchen to get some food for the monk. Their pet bird, in the meantime, thinking that the blood-stained ruby was something to eat, picked it up and swallowed it before the monk could prevent it from doing so.

When the gem polisher came back into the room, he immediately noticed that the ruby was gone. He asked his wife and son, and then the monk, if they had taken it, but they all said no. The gem polisher assumed it must have been the monk since he was the last one seen in the room with the ruby. He decided to beat the truth out of the monk, but his wife, would not let him do it. She warned him that the consequences of causing harm to a noble one would be worse than the punishment he could possibly receive from the king.

The gem polisher, however, was too furious to listen to his wife. He tied up the monk and beat him severely until blood started flowing from his head. Attracted by the sight

of the blood, the curious bird flew toward the monk, where it received a stray blow and fell dead. Only then, did the monk tell the gem polisher that it was the bird that had swallowed the ruby.

The gem polisher quickly cut open the bird and found that the monk was indeed telling him the truth. Realizing his mistake, he trembled with fear and pleaded for the monk's forgiveness. The monk replied that he felt no ill-will toward him for it was a debt that had to be repaid due to mistakes in his past lives. The monk then succumbed to his wounds and died, passing away into Parinibbana since he was already an arahat. When the gem polisher himself died, he was reborn in hell. As for his wife, she was reborn in one of the deva worlds.

> ***Some are reborn as human beings, the wicked are reborn in hell, the righteous are reborn in heaven, and those free from defilements pass away into Nibbana.***

Verse 126

Like fine dust thrown against the wind,
evil falls back upon the fool who offends a
harmless man, one pure and innocent.

Verse 125



The Unfortunate Hunter

The Unfortunate Hunter

Early one morning, Koka was on his way out to hunt with his dogs when he saw a monk on his almsround. Not particularly fond of monks, he thought that meeting one on the way would only bring him bad luck, meaning that he would probably not catch anything at all. And, indeed, as he feared, his game bag remained empty all day.

On his way home, Koka happened to come across the same monk he had seen earlier in the day. Still sore at the monk for having spoiled his hunt, he sought revenge by setting his dogs on him. The poor innocent monk just barely made it into the branches of a nearby tree when the dogs arrived snarling and snapping wildly at him. He sat there safely in the tree out of their reach until Koka came along and started poking the soles of his feet with the sharp end of one of his arrows. This made the poor monk jump about to avoid injury, and while he was doing so, his robe became undone and started slipping off him. Unable to hang on to it and keep his balance in the tree at the same time, the robe finally fell on Koka below, covering him up completely.

When the dogs saw the yellow robe, they mistook their master for the monk and attacked him mercilessly, mauling him to death.

Subsequently, the monk became fraught with guilt, feeling that it was his fault that Koka got killed. He went to seek the Buddha's advice. The Buddha assured him that it

was the hunter, not he, who was at fault, for Koka had tried to bring harm to someone who had done him no wrong. For that reason, Koka came to face an unfortunate death.

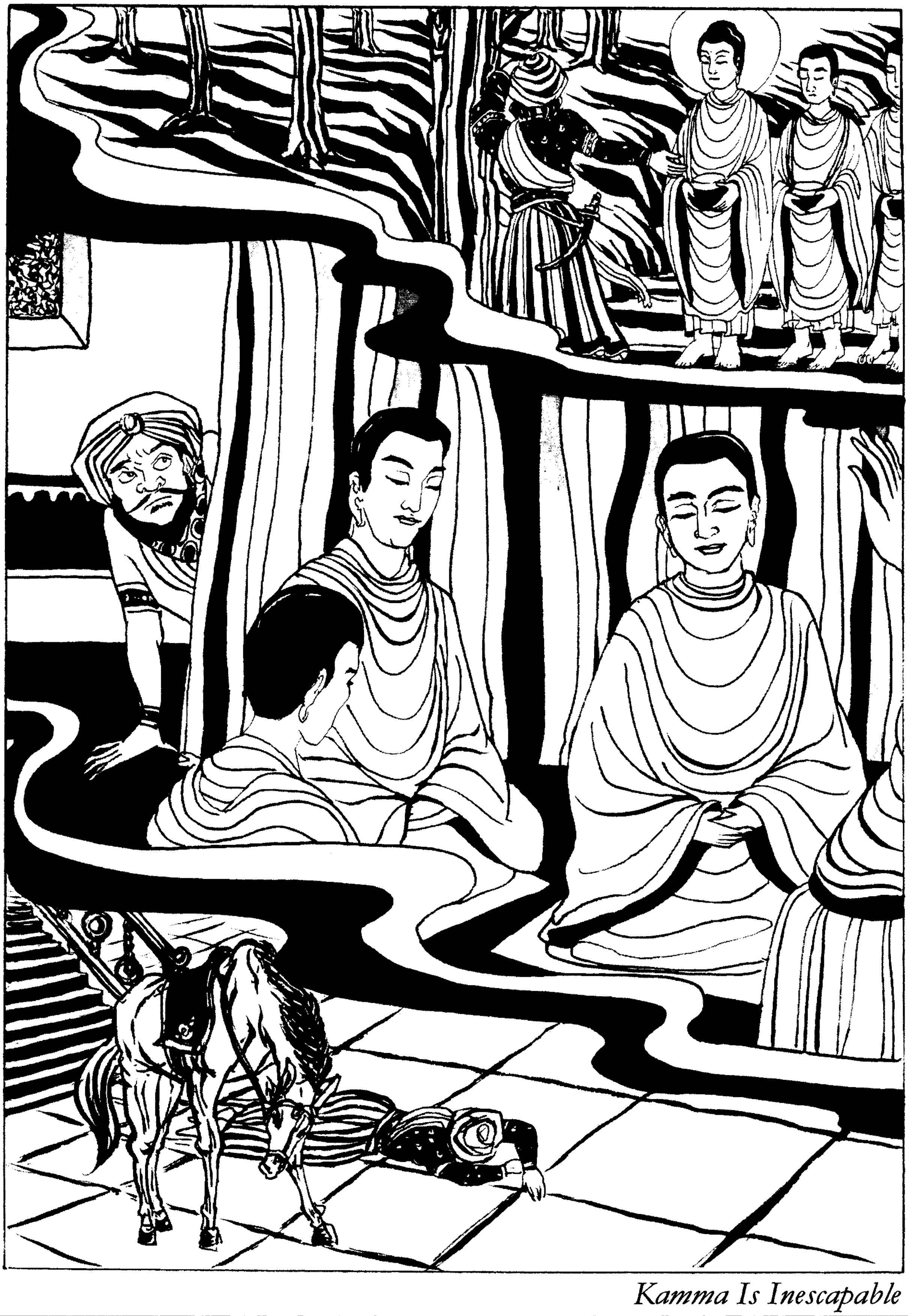
> ***Like fine dust thrown against the wind, evil falls back upon the fool who offends a harmless man, one pure and innocent,***
>
> ***Verse 125***



The Unfortunate Hunter

Not in the sky, nor in the middle of the ocean,
nor in the cave of a mountain, nor anywhere else,
is there a place where one cannot
be overcome by Death.

Verse 128



Kamma Is Inescapable

Kamma is Inescapable

King Suppabuddha was indeed not an admirer of the Buddha. He had not forgotten how the Buddha, while he was still a prince, had abandoned his beloved daughter Yasodhara for the renunciant's life.

One day, knowing that the Buddha and his disciples would be entering the city for almsfood, the king got drunk, and the wine in his veins made him brave enough to go and block the Buddha's way. He would not let the Buddha pass, saying that he, the king, could not make way for someone younger than he was. Not protesting, the Buddha and his disciples turned back. King Suppabuddha then ordered one of his men to spy on the Buddha and report back to him whatever the Buddha said.

Once back at their monastery, the Buddha said to Ananda, "The king has created bad kamma by blocking the way of the Buddha and soon he will have to pay for it."

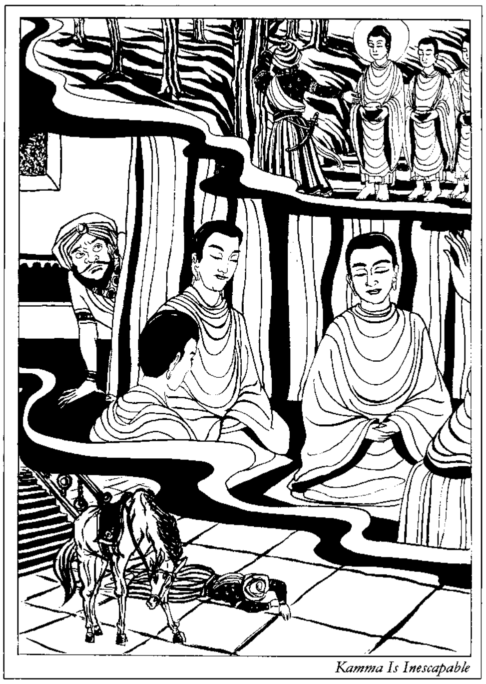
This was reported to the king who became determined to prove that the Buddha didn't know what he was talking about. He commanded all of his attendants and guards to be extra vigilant in protecting him, while he himself would take special precautions.

The news of the king's increased efforts to protect himself from harm reached the monastery where the Buddha was staying. The Buddha said that it didn't matter whether the king lived in a tower, in the sky, in an ocean, or in a

cave, because he couldn't escape the result of his kamma. Nobody could.

Several days after the road incident, the king was sitting in his room when he heard his favorite horse neighing and kicking about wildly. He became so worried that he immediately went to see what the matter was, forgetting what the Buddha had predicted for him. As he rushed out of his room, he tripped and fell down some stairs and died. When he was reborn, he was reborn in hell. So no matter how hard he tried, the foolish king was unable to escape the effects of his evil kamma. That is how the law of kamma works.

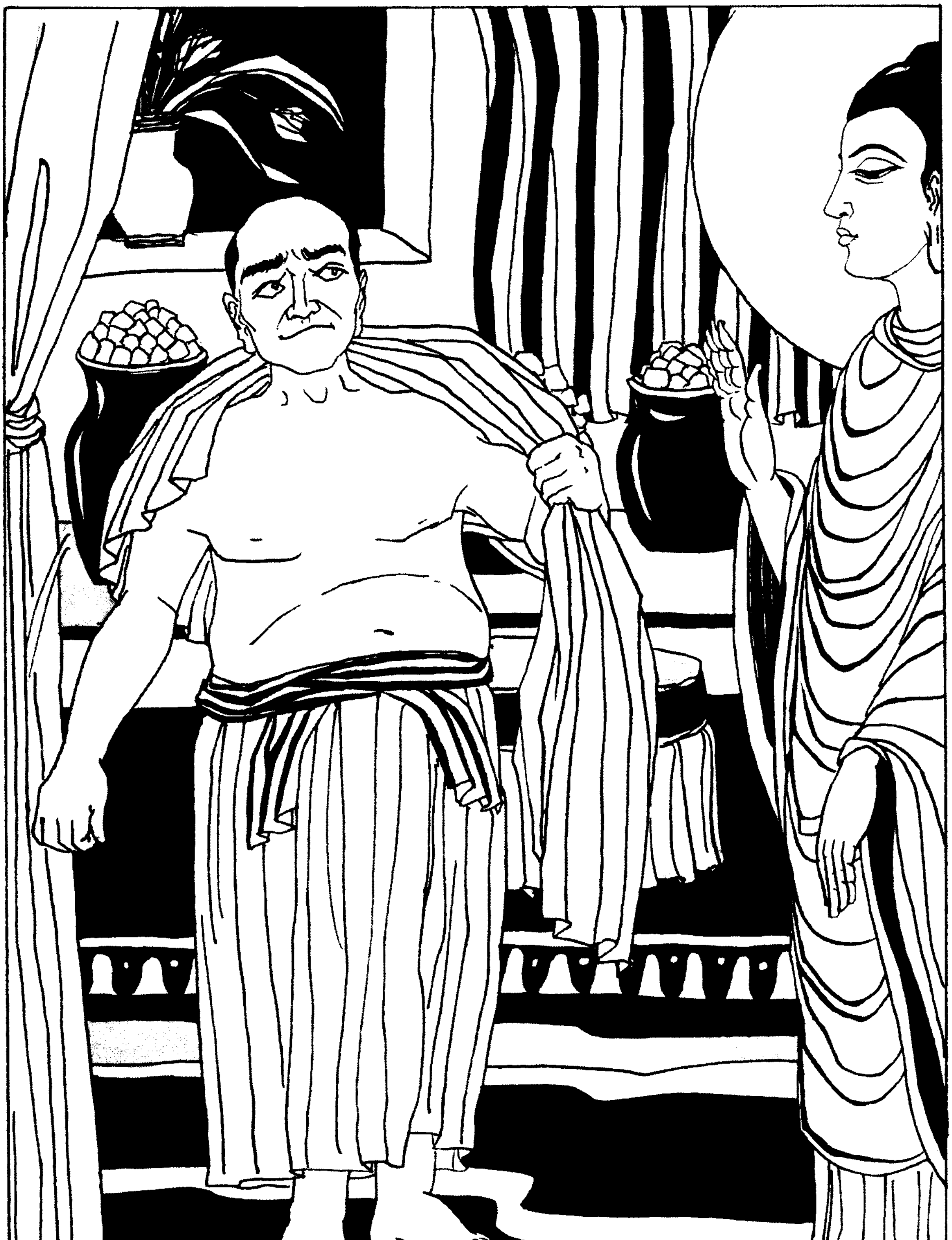
> ***Not in the sky, nor in the middle of the ocean, nor in the cave of a mountain, nor anywhere else, is there a place where one cannot be overcome by Death.***
>
> ***Verse 128***



Kamma Is Inescapable

Going naked, having matted hair,
covering oneself with mud or dust, fasting,
sleeping on bare ground,
or squatting (in penance)
cannot purify a being if he has not yet
overcome ignorance.

Verse 141



The Self-Pampered Monk

The Self-Pampered Monk

Once there was a man who lived a life free from any financial worries. After his wife passed away, he decided to leave home and become a monk. Before he received his ordination, however, he built for himself a shelter that included a room to store beans, cooking oil, butter and other provisions and a kitchen where his servants could prepare his favorite dishes. He even brought his own furniture so he could sit and sleep in comfort.

Seeing him live such a luxurious life, the other monks went and reported him to the Buddha. The Buddha then sent for the rich monk and asked him why he had brought so many things to the monastery with him. "Haven't I been teaching you to live the simple life?" the Buddha asked. The rich monk got angry. He took off his upper robe and threw it to the ground, standing half naked in front of the Buddha. "Is this how you advise me to live?" he smirked, daring to challenge the Buddha.

The Buddha admonished the self-pampered monk and told him that even while he was an evil spirit in a previous lifetime, he still had some sense of shame. Now, as a monk, however, he did not seem to have any at all. In addition, the Buddha told him that discarding his robe did not make him an austere bhikkhu. It was his ignorance he had to discard, for it was not by one's external appearance that one became holy. The bhikkhu realized his mistake and asked

the Buddha for forgiveness. He then corrected his ways and lived according to the Buddha's admonitions.

> ***Going naked, having matted hair, covering oneself with mud or dust, fasting sleeping on bare ground, or squatting (in penance) cannot purify a being if he has not yet overcome ignorance.***

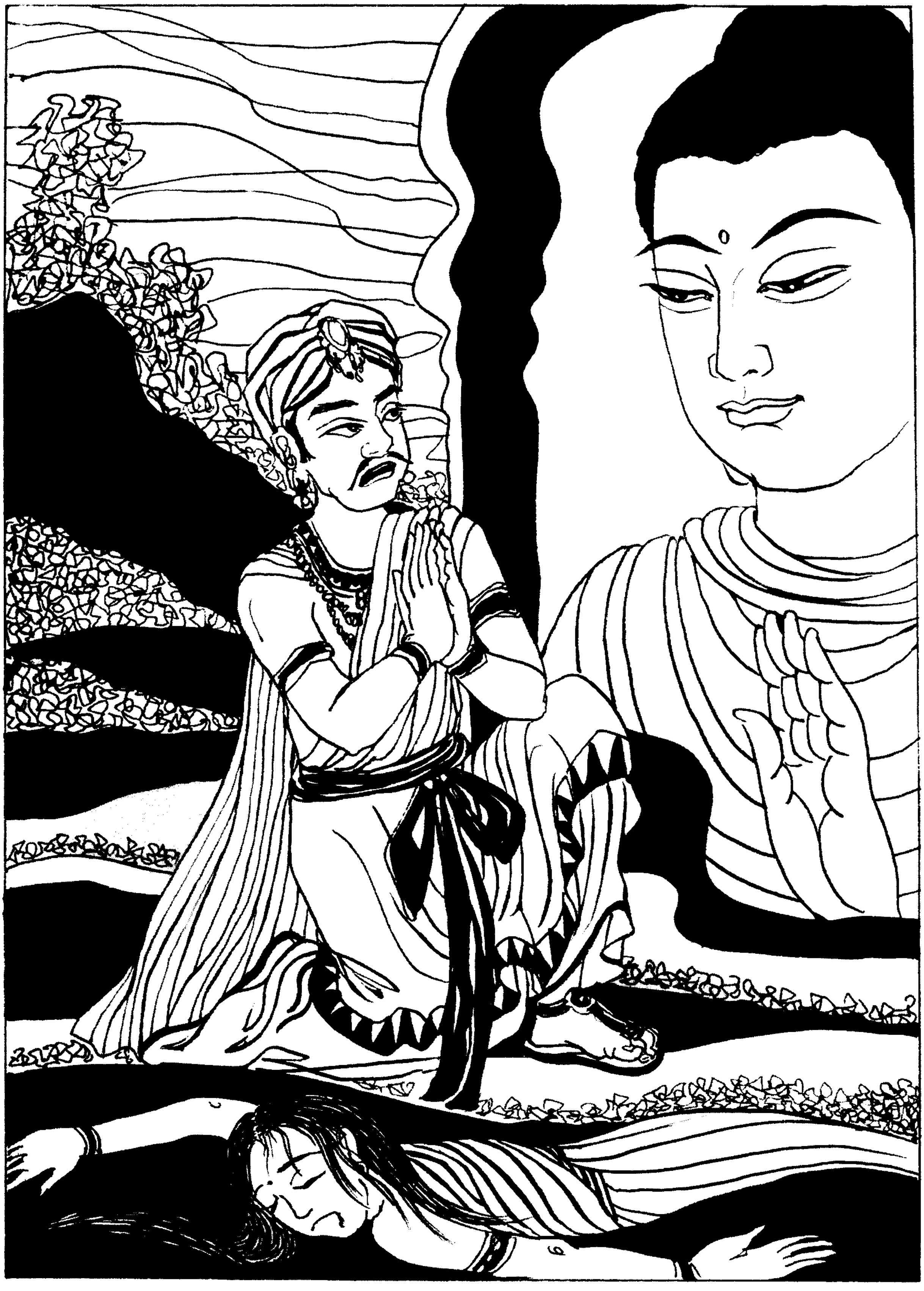
Verse 141



The Self-Pampered Monk

Even though he may be well dressed,
if he is calm, free from defilements
with his senses controlled,
established in the holy way, perfectly pure,
and has laid aside enmity toward all beings,
he is indeed a holy man, a renunciant, a monk.

Verse 142



Bhikkhu or Brahmana?

Bhikkhu or Brahmana?

ONCE THERE WAS A REBELLION against the king which one of his officers sucessfully suppressed. The king was immensely pleased and rewarded him handsomely with costly gifts and a dancing girl to keep him entertained and happy. For several days he was allowed to relax and enjoy himself, which he did with good food and wine, and the dancing girl was so beautiful and danced so gracefully that he eventually fell madly in love with her.

One morning as he was on his way to the river to take a bath, he ran into the Buddha and his disciples going on their almsround and bowed casually as a sign of respect.

The Buddha smiled and said to Ananda, "That officer will come to see me later today, and after I have preached to him, he will attain full enlightenment and then die. That officer will today realize Parinibbana."

The officer, however, had no idea what was in store for him that day. He continued entertaining his friends on the banks of the river, enjoying himself immensely. He was dizzy with delight as his lissom dancer ceaselessly swirled and twirled for their pleasure and amusement. That evening, however, the dancer collapsed from excessive exhaustion and died.

The officer felt so grieved that he went to the Buddha for some comfort and relief, his eyes still wet and swollen from all his weeping. The Buddha told him that the tears

he was shedding due to his loss was nothing compared to the amount he had already shed throughout his previous lifetimes. "Isn't it time to stop?" the Buddha asked him. "Desire is the root of your sorrow. Why not get rid of that and have no more sorrow?" At the end of the Buddha's discourse, the officer attained arahatship. Soon after that, as the Buddha had predicted, he died.

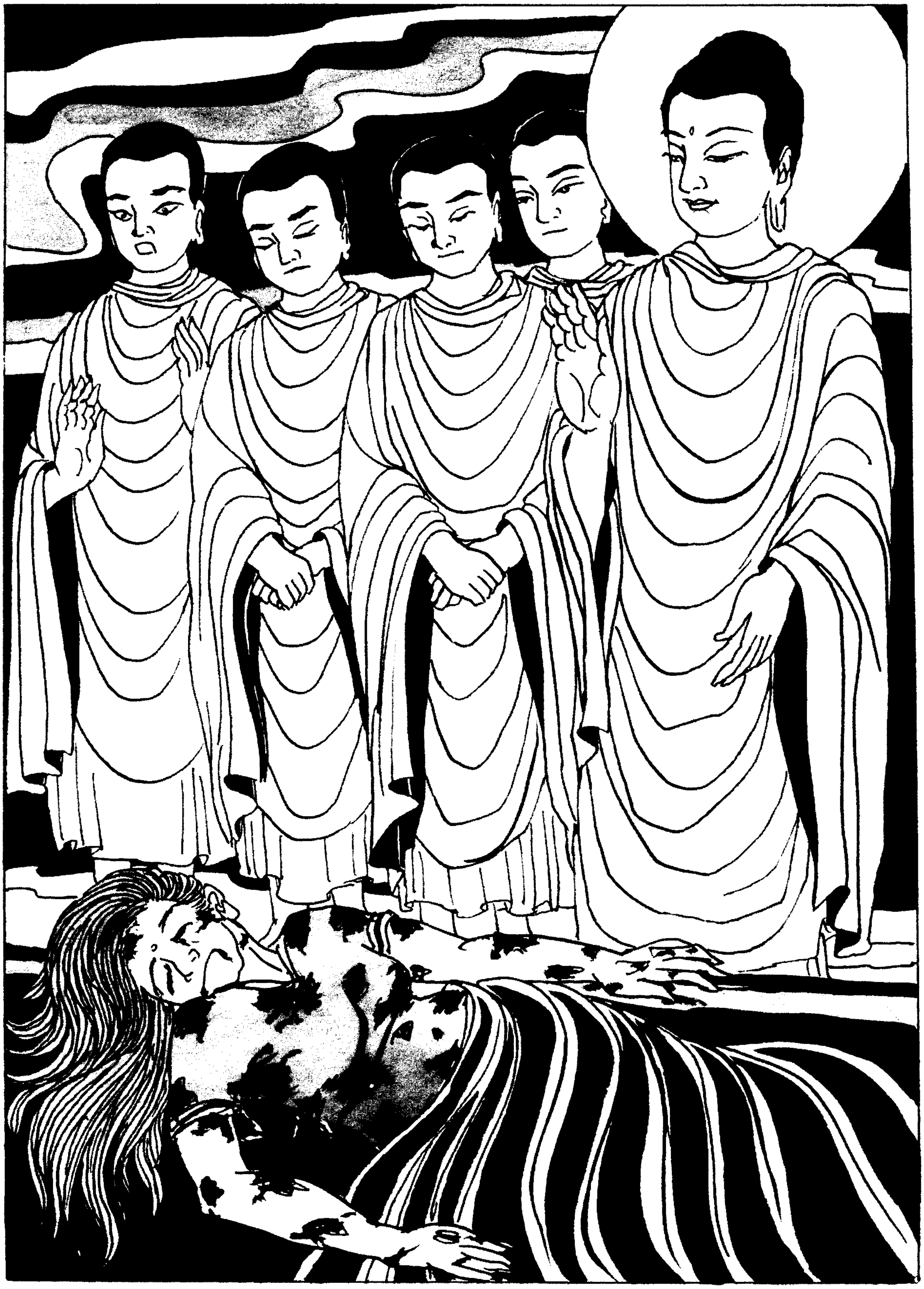
The bhikkhus were curious to know whether the officer was a bhikkhu or a brahmana since he attained Parinibbana in the clothes of a layman. The Buddha said that he could be called both because it was not by external appearances that one became holy, but by whether one's mind was pure and free from greed, hatred, and delusion.

Even though he may be well dressed, if he is calm, free from defilements with his senses controlled, established in the holy way, perfectly pure, and has laid aside enmity toward all beings, he is indeed a holy man, a renunciant, a monk.

Verse 142

Look at his beautiful body, a mass of sores,
supported by bones, sickly,
a subject of many lustful thoughts.
Indeed, the body is neither permanent nor enduring.

Verse 147



Not Even for Free

Not Even for Free

Once there lived a courtesan of incomparable beauty. She was glad to have the monks come by her home for alms, and offered them excellent food. Then one day, one of the monks who had gone to her home for almsfood happened to mention how beautiful she was. This stirred desire in the heart of one of the young monks listening.

The next morning, the young monk joined the group that was going to pass by the courtesan's house on their almsround. The courtesan happened to be ill that day, but she bid her servants carry her outside so that she could personally offer the monks something to eat. The young monk, on seeing how beautiful she was even when she was sick, developed an even stronger desire for her.

That night, however, her illness worsened and by morning she was already dead. When the Buddha received the news of her death, he advised that she not be buried for a few days, after which time he told his bhikkhus that he was going to take them to see the courtesan. When the young bhikkhu heard where they were going, his lust for the courtesan was rekindled. What he did not realize, however, was that the courtesan was already dead.

By the time the Buddha and his retinue of monks got to the cemetary, the once beautiful and desirable body of the courtesan had already been transformed into an ugly sight.

Her body was now bloated, and foul matter exuded from every which orifice.

The Buddha then announced to all who had gathered there that the courtesan would be auctioned off. Anyone who was willing to pay a thousand pieces of gold could spend the night with her in bed. Of course, nobody was willing to pay that amount, nor were they willing to pay any other price, no matter how small. In the end no one would take her even for free.

The Buddha then said to his bhikkhus, "You see, when she was alive, few would hesitate to give up all they had just to be able to spend one night in her embrace. But, now, none will take her even for free. What is beauty, then, when the body is subject to deterioration and decay?"

After listening to the Buddha's words, the lustful young monk got to realize the true nature of life and strove to free himself from the hold of sensual desire.

> ***Look at this beautiful body, amass of sores, supported by bones, sickly, a subject of many lustful thoughts. Indeed, the body is neither permanent nor enduring.***

Verse 147

This body is built up with bones
which are covered with flesh and blood.
Within it dwell decay and death,
pride and jealousy.

Verse 150



The Impermanence of Beauty

The Impermanence of Beauty

Rupananda was quite an attractive and graceful woman who was always surrounded by admirers. She never ceased to feel very lonely, however, because all those dear to her—mother, brother, and even husband—had all entered the Order. Missing her family badly, she went to visit them often and heard them speak of the Buddha in such a way that she longed to go and pay him homage too. But when she learned that the Buddha often talked about the impermanence of the body, she was afraid that he might disparage her for her beauty, and so hesitated to do so. In the end, however, she decided that no matter what the Buddha might say to her, she would go and see him anyway.

As soon as the Buddha saw Rupananda, he realized that she was someone very attached to her beauty. To teach her a lesson, he caused a vision of a ravishing young lady to appear before her. When Rupananda saw the young lady, she could not help but remark how extremely beautiful she was and exclaimed to herself, "My goodness, next to her I must look like an old crow!"

Then before Rupananda could realize what was happening, the beautiful young lady started to age and slowly deteriorate before her very eyes until she finally lay sick and helpless on the floor, rolling in her own excrement. Then she died, and Rupananda saw her corpse going through the

different stages of decay, oozing pus and other foul liquids, and finally crawling with maggots.

Witnessing this rapid succession of images, Rupananda realized that there was a continuous process of change and decay in the body. "In the same way," she thought, "like this young girl who has grown old, died, and decayed before my very eyes, I, too, will grow old and decay one day." With that realization, the attachment that Rupananda had for her body diminished and she came to perceive its true nature. She then became a nun, and under the guidance of the Buddha, eventually attained arahatship.

This body is built up with bones which are covered with flesh and blood. Within it dwell decay and death, pride and jealousy.

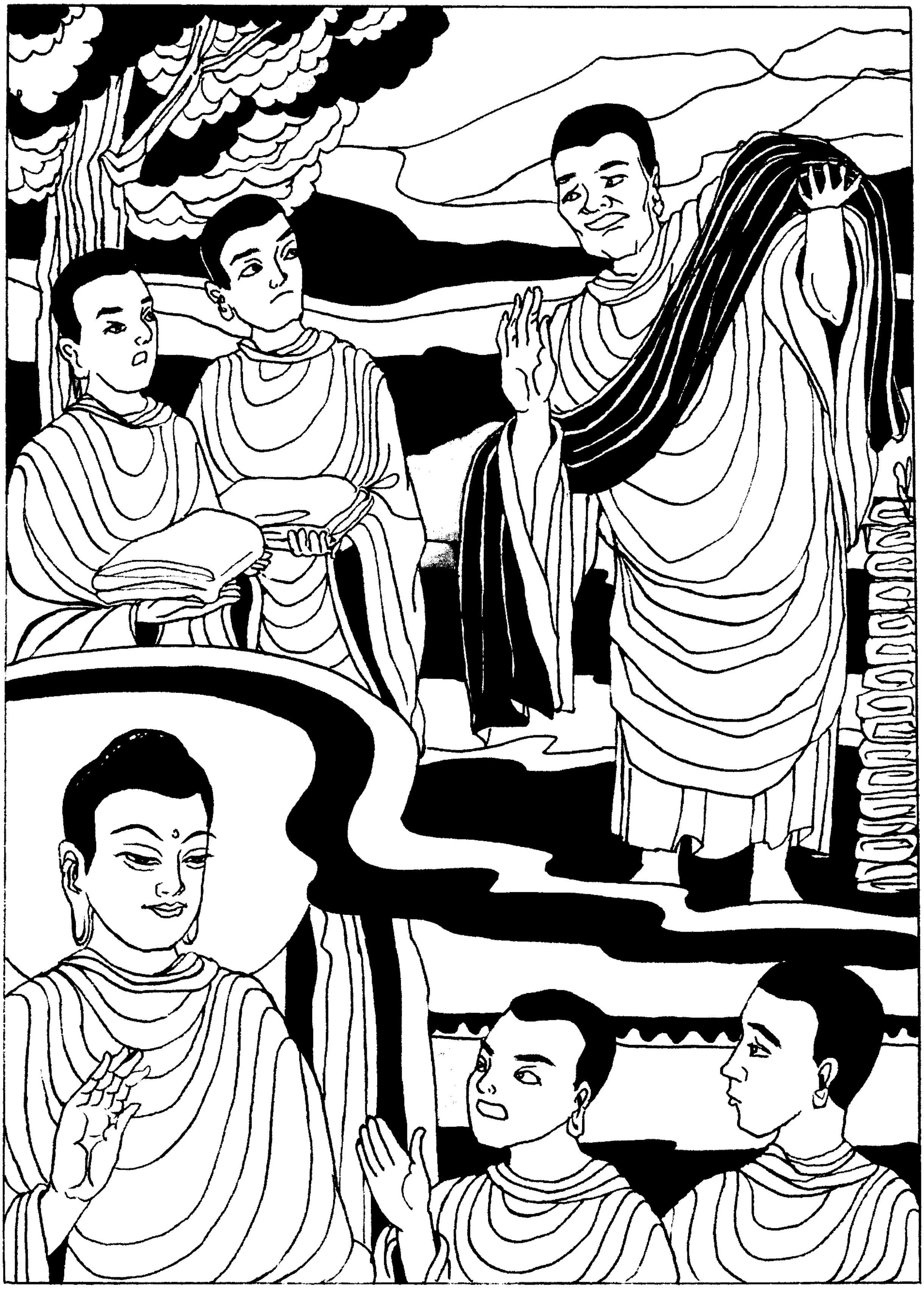
Verse 150



The Impermanence of Beauty

One should first establish oneself in
what is proper and then teach others.
A wise man should be beyond all reproach.

Verse 158



Practise What You Preach

Practise What You Preach

VEN. UPANANDA fervently preached to others not to be greedy and to be content with what they had, even if what they had was not very much. He himself, however, did not practise what he preached.

Once, Upananda went to a village monastery and there gave such inspirational discourses that the people of the village invited him to spend the vassa with them. However, when he asked them how many robes each monk would be offered at the end of the vassa and was told only one, he decided he would rather find somewhere else more "suitable." But before he set out to look for another monastery, he left a pair of his slippers behind.

At the next monastery, he found out that the bhikkhus would be getting two robes each, and there he left his staff. At the third, he learned that the bhikkhus usually received three robes, and there he left his water bottle. Finally he came to a large and rich monastery, and when he heard that the bhikkhus there would be offered four robes each, he rubbed his hands together with glee and exclaimed to himself softly, "Ah, this is the place for me! I think I'll spend my vassa here!"

When the three-month period of the vassa had drawn to a close, Upananda bundled up his four new robes and went to collect his belongings at each of the monasteries he

had earlier visited. He also claimed his share of robes as if he had spent the vassa at each one.

He then set out for his own monastery. On the way back, he came upon two young bhikkhus who were arguing about how to divide between themselves two robes and what appeared to be a costly blanket. Unable to come up with a settlement of mutual satisfaction, they were looking for a third party to arbitrate when Upananda happened to come along. Of course, Upananda was more than happy to help, for he saw something in it for him too. After pretending to have considered their case carefully, he awarded each monk a robe, and as for the luxurious blanket, he took it for himself as payment for his trouble.

The two young bhikkhus were not satisfied with the way Upananda dealt with their problem. They went and complained to the Buddha about him. The Buddha then sent for Upananda and reprimanded him for his behavior, saying, "If you want to teach others, you should first teach yourself and do as you preach."

One should first establish oneself in what is proper and then teach others. A wise man should be beyond all reproach.

Verse 158

One indeed is one's own refuge.
What other refuge can there be?
With oneself thoroughly controlled,
one can attain a refuge
which is difficult to attain.

Verse 160



The Pregnant Bhikkhuni

The Pregnant Bhikkhuni

Once there was a young woman who had only been married for a short time when she realized that her true calling was to be a nun and not a wife. Her good husband's heart broke to hear her ask permission to leave him, but because he loved her dearly, allowed her to go and fulfill her wish. She thus entered the nunhood and became a disciple of Devadatta, little knowing that she was already pregnant at the time. As the months rolled by, however, and her condition became quite obvious, the other bhikkhunis took her to see Devadatta who demanded that she disrobe. However, she refused to do so. "Why should I disrobe," she asked, "if I have not broken any monastic rule?" Instead, she went to the Buddha and became one of his disciples.

Now the Buddha knew that she had not violated any of the monastic precepts, but for the sake of her good name as well as that of the Order, the Buddha requested a public hearing of her case in the presence of the king. The aim of doing so was to prove the innocence of the bhikkhuni once and for all and to remove the last traces of doubt that anyone might still have concerning her condition.

The expectant mother was then thoroughly questioned by one of the Buddha's female devotees who was able to establish that the bhikkhuni had indeed become pregnant while she was still a lay woman and not after having entered the nunhood. The monk appointed by the Buddha to oversee the case then made a public declaration of the bhikkhuni's innocence. Everyone gathered there, including the king, returned home satisfied.

When the bhikkhuni finally gave birth to a baby boy, the good king adopted him as his very own son. However, at the age of seven, upon learning that his mother was a nun, the little boy left the palace and became a novice himself. Later, when he turned twenty, he

became a bhikkhu. He then went into a forest and after diligent practice attained arahatship. Thereafter, he continued to live in the forest alone for more than twelve years.

When his mother finally got to see him again, she could not control her excitement. She ran up to him with tears of joy in her eyes. The son, however, remained indifferent and said to her, "You are acting like a worldly mother and not as one who has entered the Order. Haven't you learned any restraint?" He then walked away, knowing full well that if he had greeted his mother otherwise, she would have remained emotionally attached to him and her own spiritual progress would have been hampered.

Unaware of her son's purpose, the mother at first could not get over how harshly he had treated her and felt heartbroken. Later, however, she saw that her son was just trying to help her. With that in mind, she practised hard and one day got to realize the futility of all emotional attachment. Letting go of such attachment, she too became an arahat.

The monks who knew the story of the bhikkhuni and her son remarked that if the mother had been foolish enough to disrobe as Devadatta had bid her, she and her son would probably not have become arahats. "They were lucky, Lord," they added, "to have come to you for refuge." The Buddha replied, "Bhikkhus, in trying to attain arahatship, you must strive diligently and depend on yourself, and not on anyone else."

One indeed is one's own refuge. What other refuge can there be? With oneself thoroughly controlled, one can attain a refuge which is difficult to attain.

Verse 160

He who overwhelms with good the evil
that he has done lights up this world
as does the moon freed from the clouds.

Verse 173



The Necklace of Fingers

The Necklace of Fingers

AHIMSAKA WAS A BRIGHT and obedient student, well loved by his teacher. His classmates soon became jealous of him and started a rumor that he was having an affair with their teacher's wife. At first the teacher refused to listen to any of the gossip, but slowly became convinced that, indeed, his favorite student was deceiving him behind his back. He became so angry that he wanted to kill Ahimsaka, but a teacher killing a student was really out of the question. He then devised a plan that he hoped would not only bring harm to Ahimsaka but satisfy his vengeance as well.

The teacher went and told Ahimsaka that he had some special knowledge which he wanted to impart to him. First, however, he was to go out and kill a thousand people, and to prove that he had really done so, he was to bring back the right index finger of each one of his victims. Ahimsaka was very unwilling to kill anyone, but because he badly wanted to have his teacher's special knowledge, and because he trusted his teacher so much, he decided to set out and do as his teacher required.

Soon Ahimsaka had so many index fingers that he did not know just how many he actually had, so he started to keep them strung around his neck in order not to lose count. Because of this morbid habit, he became known as Angulimala, which meant "garland of fingers."

When Angulimala's notoriety reached the courts of the palace, the king immediately sent out a warrant for his capture. Angulimala's mother, in the meantime, went out into the forest to look for him and warn him about the warrant. When the Buddha got wind of this, he realized what might happen to her should she find her son first, for Angulimala was already wearing 999 fingers around his neck and was eager to get the last and final one to complete his garland.

To prevent Angulimala from killing his own mother, the Buddha went and appeared before him. When Angulimala saw the Buddha, he was delighted, thinking that he had at last found his last and final finger. With dagger drawn high, he ran in haste after the Buddha. To his consternation, however, he discovered that no matter how fast he ran, he was not able to catch up with the Buddha.

He yelled for the Buddha to stop but the Buddha replied, "Angulimala, I've already stopped. It is you who have not stopped." Angulimala did not understand what the Buddha meant. The Buddha then told him, "I have stopped because I have stopped killing all living beings and have established myself in universal love. But, you, you have yet to do so." Realizing that it was the Buddha himself who was addressing him, he threw away his dagger and asked to be admitted into the Order.

When the king and his men found Angulimala in the monastery of the Buddha, they decided to leave him alone, for they saw that he had given up his old evil ways. Angulimala then continued to live under the Buddha's guidance and eventually became a saint. When he finally passed away, he realized Parinibbana.

The other monks asked the Buddha how a man who had murdered so many people could realize Parinibbana. The Buddha replied that Angulimala had previously done much evil because he lacked good friends. Later, however, because he found good friends who helped him and advised him rightly, he was able to become steadfast and mindful in his practice of the Dhamma and finally attain enlightenment. Therefore his evil deeds had been overwhelmed with good.

He who overwhelms with good the evil that he has done lights up this world as does the moon freed from the clouds.

Verse 173

For one who transgresses the truth and is given to lying, and who is unconcerned with the next life, there is no evil that he cannot do.

Verse 176



The Cloth Baby

The Cloth Baby

As more and more people became attracted to the Buddha and his teachings, the ascetics of other religions became very jealous and schemed to ruin his reputation. They asked a not uncomely young female follower of theirs to help them carry out their plan.

One day, as evening fell, the young woman started to walk in the direction of the monastery where the Buddha was staying, but in fact went and stayed at the jealous ascetics' place for the night. Early the next morning as she returned home, her curious neighbors asked her where she had been. She misled them to think that she had spent the night with the Buddha.

After a few months had passed, she began to wrap some cloth around her stomach to look pregnant, and as the months went by, she kept adding more cloth until she really looked like she was about ready to give birth. She also beat up her hands and feet until they became swollen and pretended to be feeling tired as real pregnant women do. Looking like that she went to accuse the Buddha.

The Buddha was in the middle of giving a discourse when she arrived, holding her stomach to accentuate her condition. Seeing him preaching, she confronted him and said, "Instead of shooting your mouth off like that, you should be taking care of me and your baby! Now that you have had your fun, you are no longer interested!" The Buddha let her

finish speaking and then said calmly, "Only you and I know if your words are true or not." "You're right!" she scoffed. "No one else could see what we were doing in the…"

Before she could finish her sentence, the strings holding the bundle of cloth around her stomach loosened and the "baby" fell down to her feet. Those in the congregation then realized that the woman had been lying. They scolded her severely and called her a wicked woman, a liar, and a cheat. Afraid that they would do her harm, she ran away as fast as her legs could carry her. She did not get very far, however, when she met with an unhappy mishap and died miserably.

The next day when the bhikkhus sat talking about the unfortunate woman, the Buddha told them, "Bhikkhus, he who is not afraid to tell lies and does not care what happens in his future lifetimes, won't hesitate to do any evil."

For one who transgresses the truth and is given to lying and who is unconcerned with the next life, there is no evil that he cannot do.

Verse 176

Overcome anger through kindness,
wickedness through goodness,
selfishness through charity,
and falsehood through truthfulness.

Verse 223



The Power of Loving Kindness

The Power of Loving Kindness

Newly-wed Uttara was not very happy in her new household, for although she loved to prepare alms-food for the Buddha and his disciples, she was too busy looking after the needs of her new husband to do so. She complained to her father about it and he, feeling sorry for her, sent her some money. Uttara then asked her husband if she could use it to hire a maidservant who would look after him while she used her own time to prepare almsfood for the Buddha and his monks. The husband agreed and a maidservant was employed.

One day, while Uttara was busily preparing food for one of her merit-making ceremonies, her husband happened to pass by the kitchen. Seeing his wife so happily engaged, he thought to himself, "What a foolish little woman! She should be enjoying herself instead of working so hard." And he smiled at her affectionately.

When the maidservant saw his smile, she forgot that she was only a hired hand, and in a fit of jealousy, took a pot of hot boiling butter from the stove to pour over Uttara. When Uttara realized what the maid was going to do, she made this resolution: "Let the butter scald me only if I bear any ill-will toward my maidservant." But ill-will was far from the heart of Uttara. Instead, she felt only loving kindness and gratitude toward her maid, for Uttara realized that without her, she would not have been able to carry out all

of her merit-making activities. Consequently, the hot butter simply rolled off Uttara's body like drops of cold water.

When Uttara's attendants realized what the maid had done, they seized her and started hitting her from all sides. Uttara immediately ordered them to stop.

The maid then realized that she was in no position to be jealous of Uttara. Feeling ashamed, she asked Uttara for forgiveness.

Later when the Buddha learned what had happened, he praised Uttara for having conquered anger by loving kindness. He further instructed his listeners that abuse should be conquered by non-abuse, selfishness by generosity, and lying by speaking the truth.

Overcome anger through kindness, wickedness through goodness, selfishness through charity, and falsehood through truthfulness.

Verse 223



The Power of Loving Kindness

Those who are ever vigilant,
who by day and by night discipline themselves,
and who are wholly intent upon Nibbana,
their defilements are destroyed.

Verse 226



The Diligent Do Not Sleep

The Diligent Do Not Sleep

PUNNA WAS A SLAVE GIRL who often worked until very late at night. One day it was already nearly midnight when she had just finished pounding some rice for the next day's meal. Tired, she stopped to rest for a while, and as she did, she noticed some monks who were on their way back to their monastery after listening to the Dhamma in a nearby forest. She could not help but wonder what they could be doing up so late. "I myself have to be up late because I am poor and have to work hard," she thought to herself, "but what could monks be doing up at this time of the night?" She guessed that maybe one of them had had an accident or was sick, or something of that nature.

The next morning, Punna was about to eat a pancake that she had made from some leftover rice flour when she noticed the Buddha passing by her master's house. She had always wanted to make an offering to the Buddha but rarely had a chance. It seemed that when she did have something nice to offer him, the Buddha never came around, and when she did not have anything, she would see him. Although what she had was just a coarse pancake, she still wanted to offer it to the Buddha, and although she was truly afraid that he would not accept such unrefined food, she went ahead and offered it to him anyway. To Punna's surprise and joy, the Buddha not only humbly accepted her pancake, but sat down in a suitable spot and ate it right in front of her.

After the Buddha had eaten the pancake, Punna, still curious about the monks she had seen the night before, asked the Buddha what they could have been doing up at such a late hour. The Buddha replied by saying, "Punna, just as you have no time to sleep because you have to work hard pounding rice late into the night, my disciples do not go to sleep because they have to work hard at being vigilant and mindful." The Buddha then went on to tell her that it did not matter what position one had in life, be it king, slave, or monk. What really mattered was that one never ceased to be mindful and vigilant.

Punna reflected on the Buddha's words and realized the Dhamma.

> ***Those who are ever vigilant, who by day and by night discipline themselves, and who are wholly intent upon Nibbana, their defilements are destroyed.***

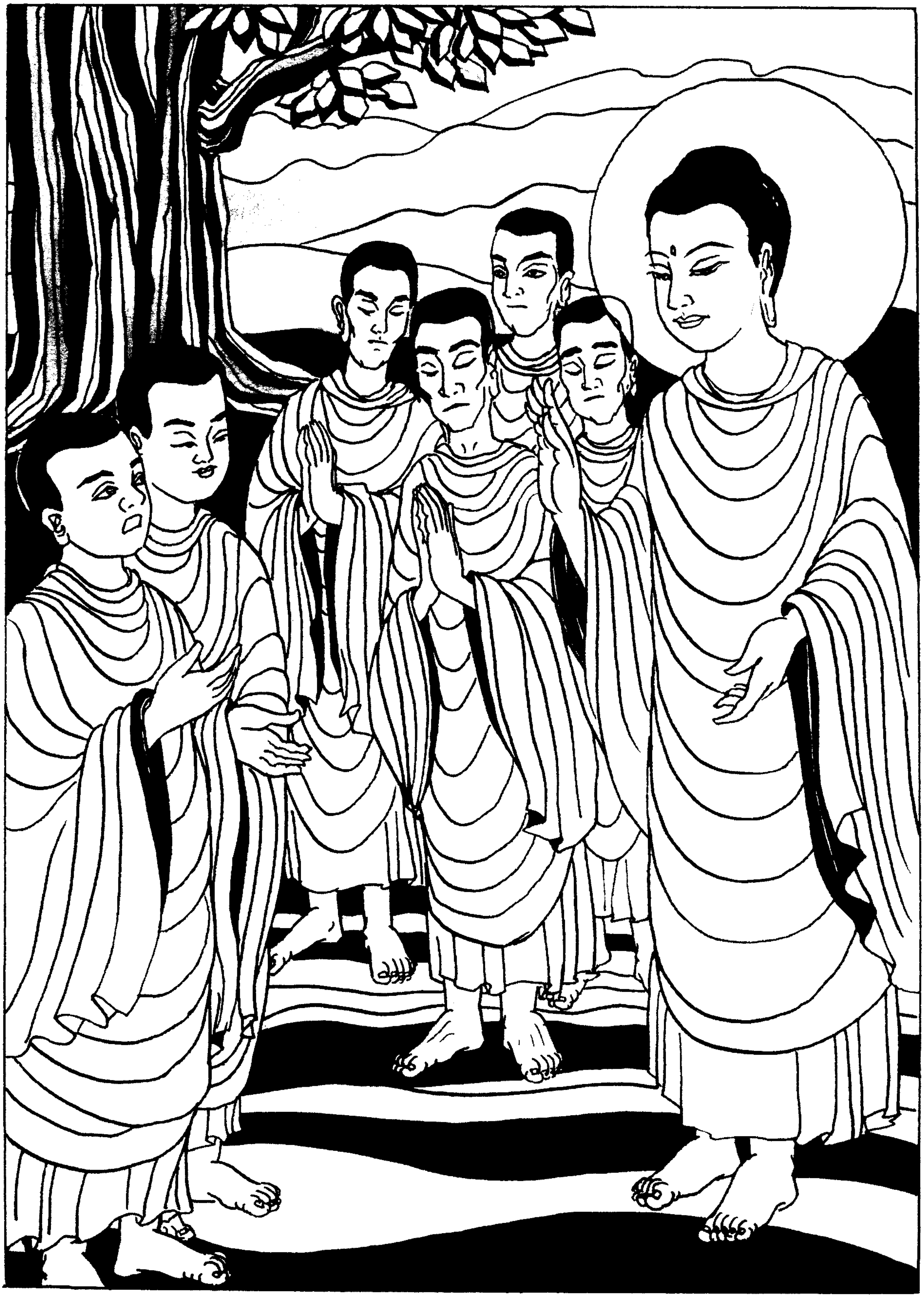
Verse 226



The Diligent Do Not Sleep

It is better for one to eat a red-hot lump
of iron burning like a flame than to eat
almsfood offered by the pious
if one is without morality and
unrestrained in thought, word, and deed.

Verse 308



The Great Pretenders

The Great Pretenders

Once there was a time of great hardship in the country and the monks who were spending the vassa near a poor village found themselves with very little lay support.

In order to get enough food, the bhikkhus addressed each other in such a way that the people in the village, never suspecting that they would be deceived by monks, believed that they had attained sainthood. And as the news of them spread, they gained even more respect. So the villagers, although themselves struggling to survive, mangaged to pool together enough food to keep their "saints" well fed and comfortable.

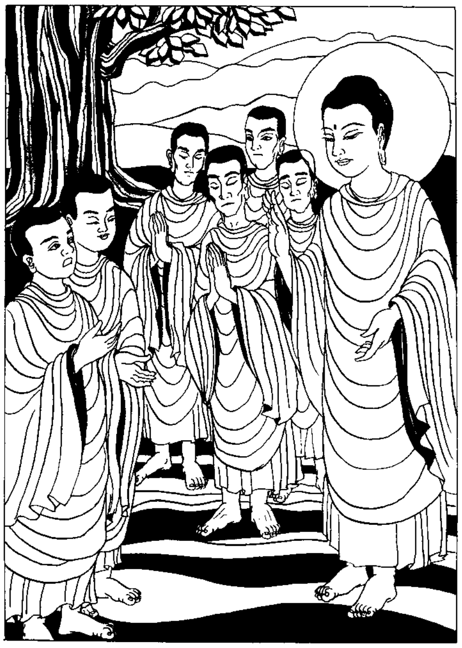
When the vassa came to a close and all the bhikkhus who had spent their vassa away from the Buddha went back to pay their respects to him, as was the custom, the well-fed bhikkhus stood out like a sore thumb. Everyone else looked so thin and pale next to them.

The Buddha asked the healthy bhikkhus how they had managed to do so well when the other monks could barely get by. The bhikkhus, expecting praise for their cleverness, recounted how they had misled the poor villagers into believing that they were saints. "And are you really saints?" the Buddha asked them, knowing full well that they were not. When they admitted that they were not, the Buddha warned them that to accept requisites from lay supporters,

if they did not truly merit them, was indeed very unwholesome action and should be refrained from.

> ***It is better for one to eat a red hot lump of iron burning like a flame than to eat alms-food offered by the pious if one is without morality and unrestrained in thought, word, and deed.***

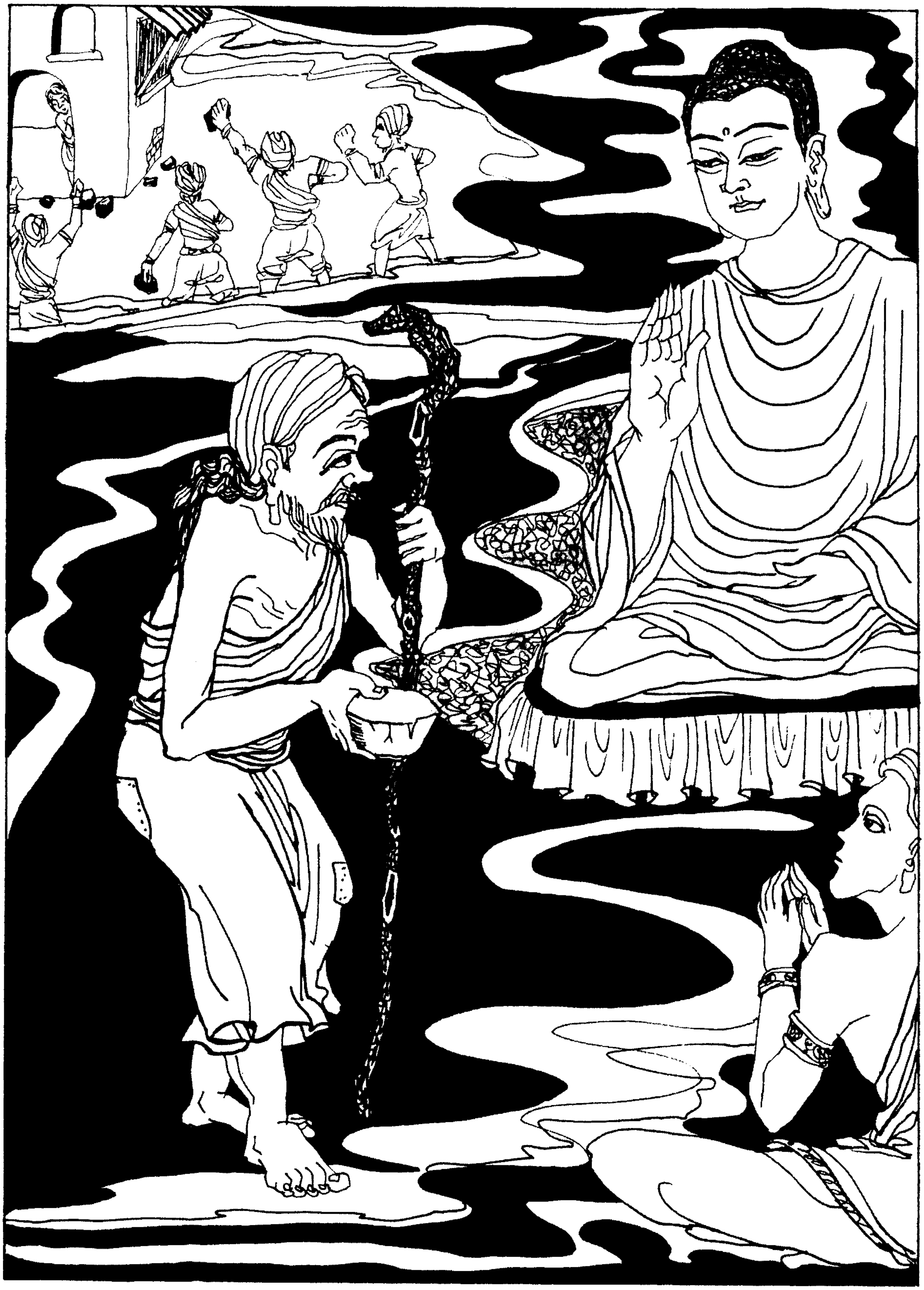
♧ *Verse 308*



The Great Pretenders

During the rutting season,
the elephant called Dhanapala is uncontrollable.
Held in captivity,
he eats not a morsel, yearning for his native forest
(i.e. longing to look after his parents).

Verse 324



The Ungrateful Sons

The Ungrateful Sons

Once there was an old man who was very well off, and when his four sons got married, he gave each of them a generous portion of his wealth as a wedding present.

Then his wife died, and although his sons affectionately looked after him after that, they did so with a devious ulterior motive: they wanted to possess the rest of his fortune. And they finally succeeded, leaving their aging father with hardly a cent left to his name.

Unable to manage by himself, the father went to stay at his eldest son's home. Not more than a few days later, however, he was driven out by his nagging daughter-in-law who did not want to have anything to do with an unwelcomed "burden" in her household. To add insult to injury, his ungrateful son raised no objection to his wife's doing. The poor old man was to receive the same mean hospitality at the house of each of his other three sons.

Helpless and miserable, the father went to seek solace and advice from the Buddha, with nothing but a staff and a bowl that he could call his own. After the old man recounted how his sons had mistreated him, the Buddha told him how to go about teaching his greedy and ungrateful sons a lesson. The Buddha instructed him to say the following words whenever he found himself in a crowd of people: "My greedy sons are deceitful and unkind. They call me father but do not understand the meaning of the word. Now that I have given them all of my wealth, they have let their wives drive me out of their houses and treat me like a beggar. Alas, I can depend more on this old and crooked staff of mine than I can on my own four sons!"

As advised by the Buddha, the old man went about announcing the cause of his wretched condition whenever he came across an assembly of people. Then one day he came upon a crowd in which his ungrateful sons were also present. When he had finished his plaintive announcement, the people listening to him were filled with pity. Their pity, however, turned into rage once they realized that the very sons the old man was complaining about were among them. The sons had to flee for their lives.

When they were sure they were out of danger, the sons sat down and discussed their poor father's situation. They ashamedly admitted that they indeed had been ungrateful and disloyal to a father who had always been but good and generous to them. Filled with remorse, they went to look for their father, and finding him, asked for his forgiveness. They also promised that they would look after him and respect and honor him as a father should be. They also warned their wives to take good care of their father or else they would be in great trouble indeed.

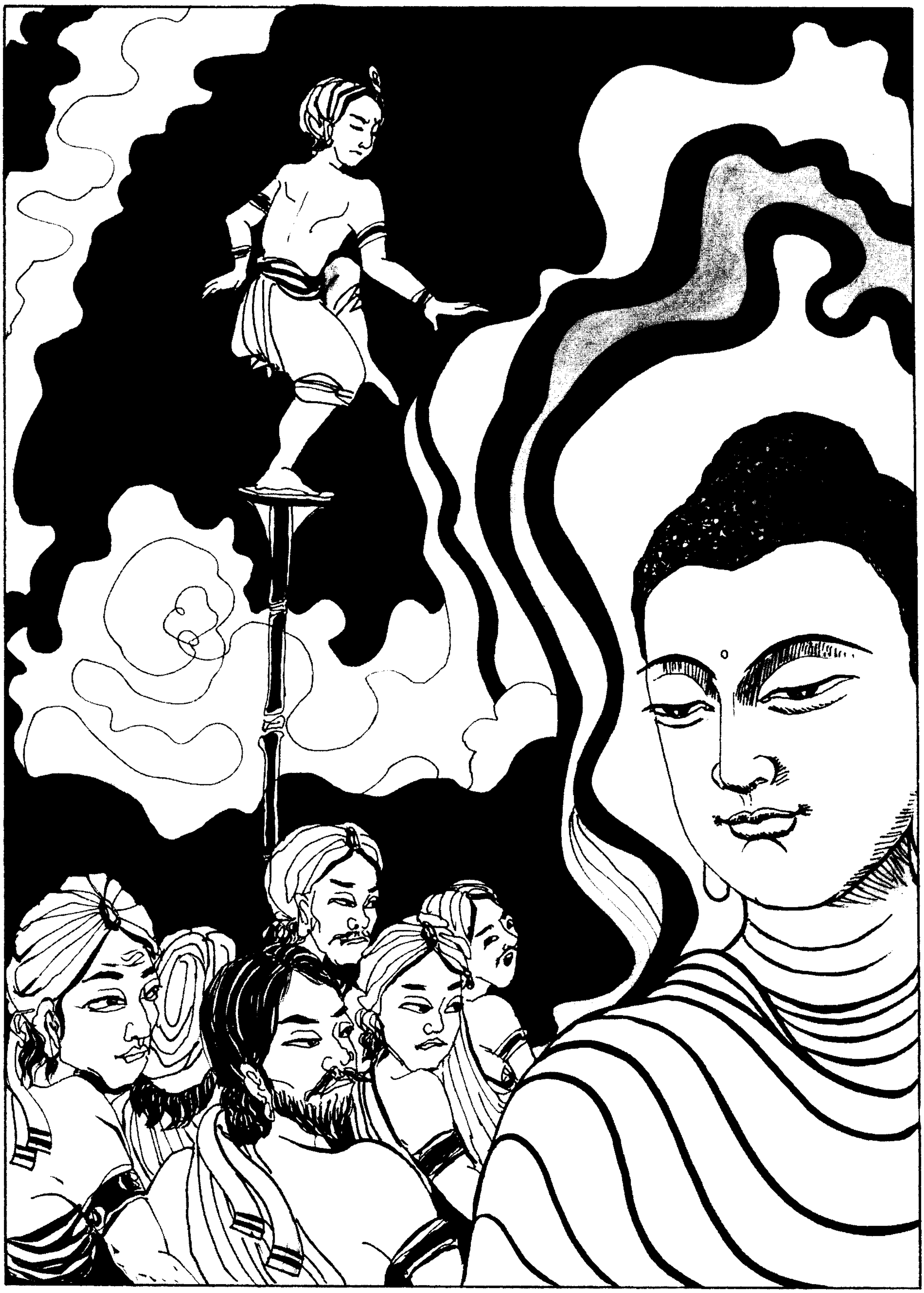
One day, the eldest son invited the Buddha to his house for a meal at which time the Buddha gave a sermon on the merits that one gains by tending to the welfare of one's parents. He included in his sermon the story of Dhanapala, an elephant who cared so much for his parents that when he got caught, was unable to eat because he was so worried about them.

During the rutting season, the elephant called Dhanapala is uncontrollable. Held in captivity, he eats not a morsel, yearning for his native forest (i.e. longing to look after his parents).

Verse 324

Give up the past,
give up the future, give up the present.
Having reached the end of existences,
with a mind freed from all conditioned things,
you will not again undergo birth and decay.

Verse 348



Sainthood on Top of a Pole

Sainthood on Top of a Pole

Once a wandering troupe of circus performers were in vited to the palace to perform for the king and his court. Among the troupe's jugglers and acrobats was a charming young lady who danced with grace and agility on the top of a long pole. One of the young men in the audience, named Uggasena, fell in love with her and even tually married her. Finally when it was time for the troupe to move on to another town, he and his new wife decided to move on with them.

Uggasena, himself, though, did not have any special talent that the troupe could use, and so was relegated to moving and packing crates, driving carts, and other menial tasks. This displeased his wife.

After some time, they had a son. One day, Uggasena could not help but overhear the lullaby his wife was singing to their child: "You poor child, your father can only carry boxes and drive carts. Your father is truly worthless."

Thinking that his wife's arrogance was due to her skill as an acrobat, he decided to become one himself. He asked his father-in-law to train him, and not long after, he was ready to perform. On the day of his performance, he climbed up his pole with facility, and once on top, did somersaults that left the audience gasping in horror but utterly delighted.

While he was performing, the Buddha happened to pass by and saw that Ugassena was ripe for arahatship. So he

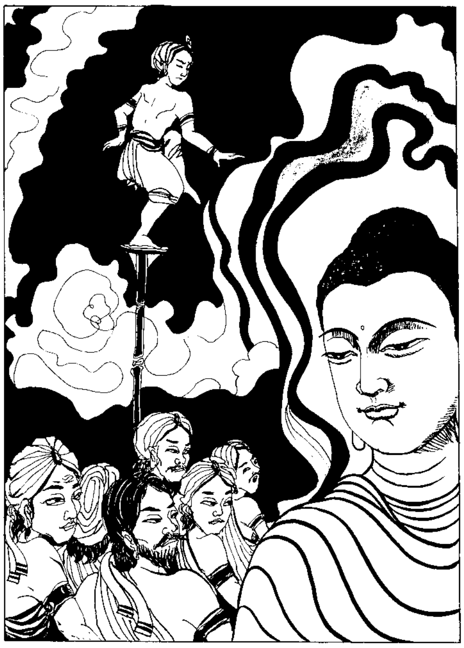
drew the audience's attention away from Ugassena by his will power and left him stranded on top of his pole with no applause. "My wife will laugh in my face," Uggasena thought, "if she finds out that the audience lost interest in my act even before I was half way through it?" Feeling distraught, he just sat on his pole and sulked.

The Buddha then called up to him and said, "A wise man should work diligently toward abandoning all forms of attachment and thus be free from having to be born again."

Uggasena reflected on the Buddha's words and attained arahatship while still sitting on top of his pole.

Give up the past, give up the future, give up the present. Having reached the end of existences, with a mind freed from all conditioned things, you will not again undergo birth and decay.

Verse 348



Sainthood on Top of a Pole

He who does not take the mind and body as "I" and "mine" and who does not grieve for what he has not is indeed called a bhikkhu.

Verse 367



Almsfood Is Almsfood

Almsfood is Almsfood

Once there lived a kind-hearted brahmin who often offered food to the Buddha and his monks whenever they came by on their almsround. One day they happened to arrive when he was already in the middle of his meal, and though they patiently stood in front of his door, he did not notice them. His wife did, however, but she did not want her husband to know that they had come, for she knew that he would surely offer them the rest of his meal. That would mean she would have to go back into the kitchen and cook some more, which she really was not in the mood to do.

So she stood in front of the doorway in such a way that the Buddha and his monks remained cut from her husband's view. She then quietly eased herself to the door within the Buddha's listening reach and whispered to him through the corner of her mouth that there was no almsfood for them that day.

The Buddha and his disciples were already walking away when the husband noticed his wife's strange behavior and asked her what she was up to. As she turned from the door, he caught sight of the edge of a monk's robe leaving the doorway and immediately realized what had happened.

He jumped from behind his unfinished plate of food and ran after the Buddha. He apologized profusely for his wife's crude behavior toward them and begged the Buddha to return with him and accept his food, although already

partially eaten. The Buddha did not hesitate to accept the brahmin's offer and said, "Any food is suitable for me, even if it be the last remaining spoonful of an unfinished meal, for that is the way of a bhikkhu." The brahmin then asked the Buddha how a bhikkhu was to be defined. The Buddha's response was quite succinct and clear: "A bhikkhu," he said, "is one who no longer has any attachment to body or mind and does not long for what he doesn't have."

He who does not take the mind and body as "I" and "mine" and who does not grieve for what he has not is indeed called a bhikkhu.

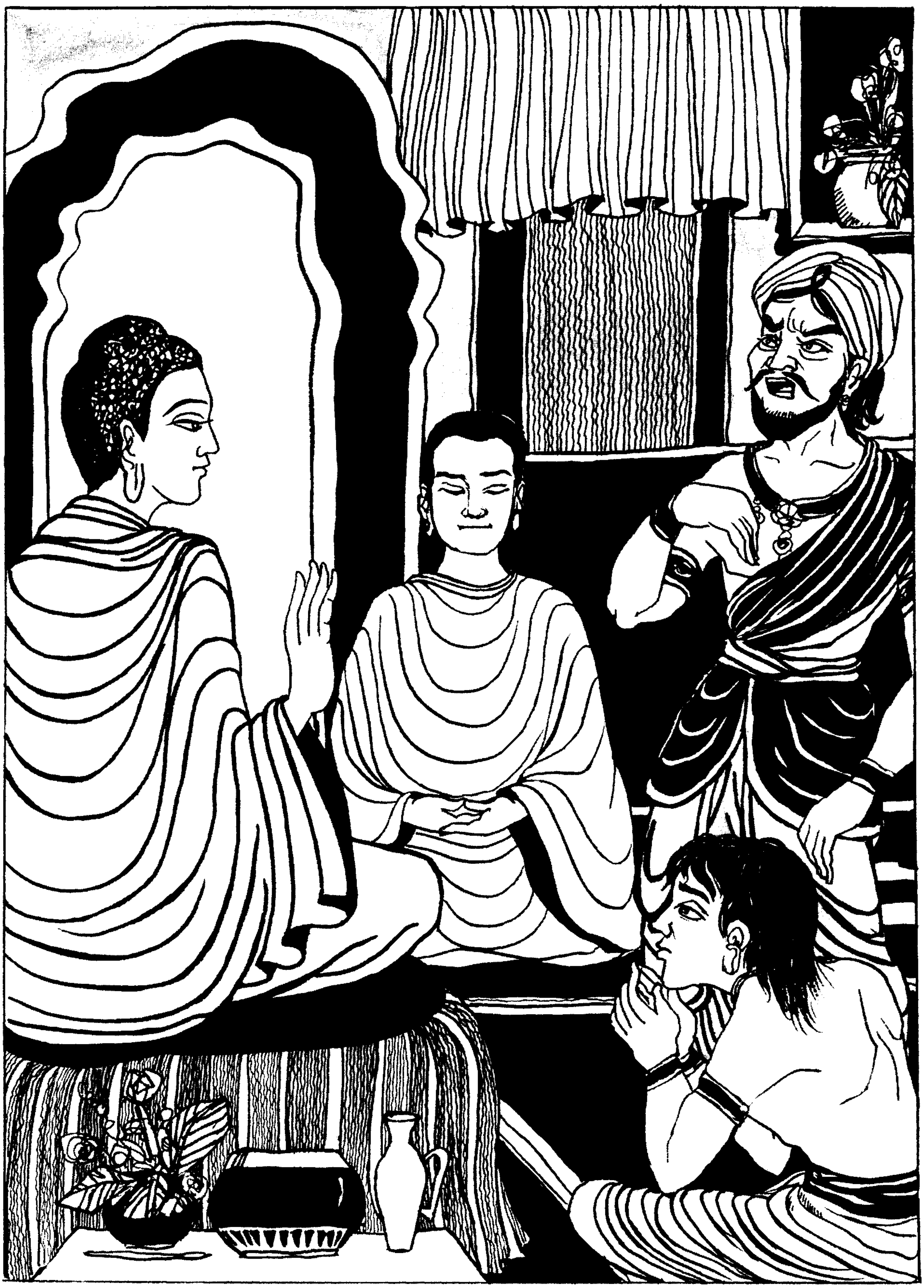
Verse 367



Almsfood Is Almsfood

He who without anger endures abuse,
beating and punishment,
and whose power of patience is like the
strength of an army, him do I call a holy man.

Verse 399



The Abusive Brothers

The Abusive Brothers

ONCE THERE WAS A BRAHMIN whose wife loved to praise and speak kindly of the Buddha. He did not mind it at first, but soon his wife's increased fondness for the Buddha caused him to become jealous.

One day he went to where the Buddha was staying, armed with a question he thought would leave the Buddha baffled and humiliated. In that way, he thought his wife would realize how misplaced her admiration for the Buddha was.

The husband asked the Buddha, "What do we have to kill to be able to live happily and peacefully?" The Buddha's reply was simple but one that left the angry man appeased and inspired. "To be able to live happily and peacefully," the Buddha replied, "one has to kill anger, for anger itself kills happiness and peace." The man reflected on the Buddha's answer and decided to become a bhikkhu himself. Finally he became an arahat.

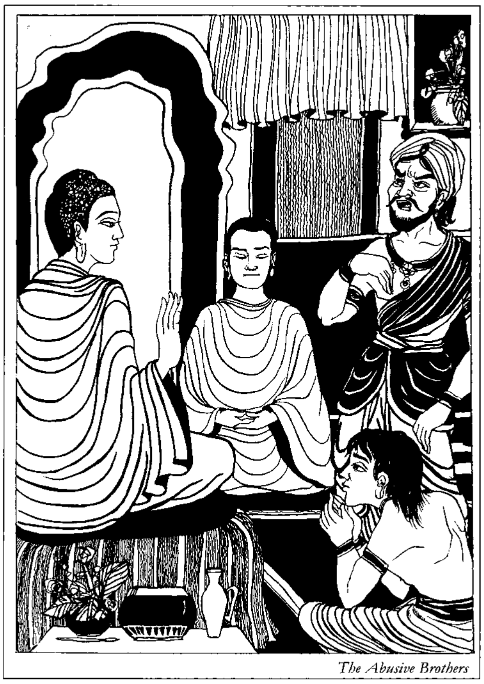
When the younger brother heard that his elder brother had become a monk, he in turn became very angry. He went and confronted the Buddha, abusing him badly. When he had finished his string of abusive words, the Buddha asked him, "If you offered some food to a guest who came to your house, and the guest left without eating any of it, who would the food belong to?" The brahmin conceded that the food would belong to him. The Buddha then said, "In the same way, I do not wish to accept your abuse, so the abuse

belongs to you." The man realized his mistake and felt great respect for the Buddha because of the lesson he had taught him. He, too, became a bhikkhu and later also attained arahatship.

The bhikkhus remarked how wonderful it was that the Buddha could make those who came to abuse him realize the Dhamma and take refuge in him. The Buddha replied, "Because I do not answer wrong with wrong, many have come to take refuge in me."

> ***He who without anger endures abuse, beating and punishment, and whose power of patience is like the strength of an army, him do I call a holy man.***

Verse 399



The Abusive Brothers



Selected verses from the Dhammapāda and the stories behind them, all depicted in thirty-two beautiful illustrations.